

STOP BUTTON SUM UPS

ELEANOR PARKER



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Part 1: Dream Factory

In June 1941, right before turning nineteen years old, Eleanor Parker signed on as a contract player at Warner Bros. She had just finished a year at the Pasadena Playhouse. Parker started acting in high school and had been dodging studio screen tests since she was fifteen; she wanted to continue developing her craft on stage. Warner made an offer two days after Parker's screen test. The studio was so enthusiastic about Parker they cast her in what would be their second-biggest hit of the year, *They Died with Their Boots On*.

Unfortunately, Parker's part in *Boots* ended up on the cutting room floor.

The studio then put her in a couple of its Technicolor shorts, which, post-Pearl Harbor, were now focused on propaganda. The first, *Soldiers in White*, came in February 1942, just over two months after Pearl Harbor. The second, *Men of Sky*, arrived in July. Parker played a nurse in the former and a war widow in the latter. Even with only two lines in *Sky*, she easily gives the best performance (as she also does, but with more material, in *Soldiers*). B. Reeves Eason directed both the shorts and Owen Crump contributed their unfortunate screenplays.

Parker's feature debut came in September 1942, with B-picture *Busses Roar*; it came out fifteen months after Parker signed with the studio (and almost a year since her A picture "debut" in *Boots*).

Like most of Parker's 1940s films, *Busses Roar* is a home front picture. Fourth-billed (of five), Parker plays a bus terminal candy girl. The story concerns Axis saboteurs using a Greyhound bus to bomb an oil field. Richard Travis is the lead, with Julie Bishop his love interest. D. Ross Lederman directs the fifty-eight minute film.

Busses Roar is a busy picture; most of it takes place in the bus terminal, introducing various travelers and their subplots. Screenwriters George Bilson and Anthony Coldeway need to pad out the short run time as the film doesn't have the budget for its action-packed finale. The terminal scenes are solidly produced however. Bishop's not bad and Travis is likable. He's not good, but he is likable. Parker doesn't get a significant enough character to make any impression—despite her being higher billed than actors who get better material.

In general, critics liked *Busses Roar*. Though definitely not The New York Times. Warner's B-picture wartime propaganda pictures are mostly forgotten—at

least by the studio's home video department. *Busses Roar* has never had any home video release, though it does show up from time to time on Turner Classic Movies. It's an inglorious, but not embarrassing, start to Parker's feature filmography.

Parker's next film, *The Mysterious Doctor*, came out in March 1943. Another home front picture—though this time the British home front—*Doctor* combines propaganda with horror thriller. It's a ghost story, with a (headless) ghost terrorizing tin miners to keep them from providing His Majesty's Armed Forces with that valuable wartime material. Parker's character is the practically the only one in the town who keeps her head (figuratively) when confronted with the supernatural. Benjamin Stoloff directs from a Richard Weil script. Also starring John Loder and Bruce Lester, *Mysterious Doctor* clocks in just under an hour. Another B picture for Parker.

With its American actors in its British setting, not to mention the foggy moor scenery, *Mysterious Doctor* at first glance seems like a Warner B riff on the Universal horror classics. It's got more going on than just that riff, however. Second-billed Parker turns out to be the lead, getting a lot to do in the film and doing it all quite well. The finale's problematic—director Stoloff actually does worst on the thriller aspects—but *Doctor's* a nice, nimble B, with a good dash of humor.

While at least one contemporary critic liked *Mysterious Doctor*—and Parker enough to single her out in the review—the film was not a breakout hit. Just like *Busses Roar*, *The Mysterious Doctor* has had no home video release. Turner Classic Movies airs the film. While better known than *Busses Roar*, *Doctor* seems to suffer an unduly harsh reputation, emphasizing its failures over its successes.

In May 1943, Parker finally got a part in another A picture and she didn't end up on the cutting room floor. In *Mission to Moscow*—director Michael Curtiz's first film after *Casablanca*—Parker plays lead Walter Huston's daughter. The film's an adaptation of Joseph E. Davies's memoir about his time in the Soviet Union as United States ambassador. Davies's book had been a big hit and expectations were high for the film.

Curtiz's direction is excellent, Huston's performance is excellent, Howard Koch's script is fine. It's just too much of a propaganda piece—Huston, wife Ann Harding, and (sometimes) Parker tediously tour the Soviet Union (as shot in

Hollywood U.S.A.)—there’s nothing else to it. No subplots, no drama, no nothing. It’s an artificial marketing travelogue. Parker is fine and appealing in a minuscule part. The film occasionally even forgets about her. Fellow Warner contractee Richard Travis (from *Busses Roar*) shows up as Parker’s occasional chaperone.

Upon release, *Moscow* was far from a success. Despite the Office of War Information signing off on the finished product, the United States public had changed its mind about the Soviet Union in the year and few months between the release of the book and the film. Contemporary critics particularly disliked the overt propaganda as well as the historical inaccuracies. In the late forties, the film and its producers would come under fire from the House Committee on Un-American Activities.

The film remained out of circulation until the 1970s, when it started airing on television. It has had some critical reevaluation since, though it still remains more a curiosity than anything else. Warner Archive released the film on DVD and it airs on Turner Classic Movies. Another inglorious propaganda picture for Parker, though at least this one is on home video.

The following year, 1944, would be Parker’s busiest of the forties. She would appear in four films before it was over, starting with May’s *Between Two Worlds*. Directed by Edward A. Blatt and costarring John Garfield, Paul Henreid, and Sydney Greenstreet, Parker got the last of the four top billings. She plays top-billed Henreid’s wife, though second-billed Garfield’s the real star.

While the film’s based on Sutton Vane’s 1924 play, *Outward Bound*, Daniel Fuchs’s screenplay updates the story to the modern day. A group of travelers are on a ship escaping the bombings in World War II London and headed to the United States. Or are they? Are they perhaps headed somewhere else entirely? With Warner notables in the supporting cast—Edmund Gwenn, Faye Emerson—*Between Two Worlds* might not have had the street cred of *Mission to Moscow* but it’s an A picture and Parker’s in a big part.

Between Two Worlds runs too long—almost two hours and it’s a bumpy voyage throughout. Henreid, who anchors Parker, can’t keep up with Garfield, who takes over the film despite coming in late. Parker has some good scenes, a solo one towards the end in particular. The supporting performances are good. Sydney Greenstreet’s real good. *Between Two Worlds* is lucky to have a built in character winnowing, which propels it when Fuchs’s script and Blatt’s direction

don't.

Until Warner Archive put it out on DVD, *Between Two Worlds* had never had a home video release. Turner Classic Movies has played it regularly over the years and the film's gotten itself an audience. When I was first discovering Eleanor Parker movies, *Between Two Worlds* was the only one of her early films anyone else was familiar with.

Parker's next film, *Crime by Night*, arrived in September. It was back to B pictures for Parker and *Two Worlds* costar Faye Emerson; it's also one of Parker's smallest Warner parts. She plays ex-wife to lead Jerome Cowan, a New York detective who's in a small town investigating a case. Jane Wyman plays Cowan's secretary and sidekick. William Clemens directs the seventy minute picture—so a longer B anyway—from a script by Richard Weil and Joel Malone. Weil wrote *The Mysterious Doctor*, which mixed home front propaganda with a horror picture. *Crime by Night* is also another Warner mixer—this time murder mystery and home front propaganda.

Crime by Night is a serviceable B mystery. Not all of the performances are good—Faye Emerson and Charles Lang aren't—but Jane Wyman's a great lead. Cowan's drunken, corrupt, philandering detective occasionally amuses. Parker does quite well implying a lot more depth to her character than ends up on screen (she and Cowan have a child together, who inexplicably never shows up). Even with *Crime's* problems, Wyman's so incredibly appealing, it's too bad Warner didn't do a series with she and Cowan's characters.

Contemporary critics received *Crime by Night* well enough. It had been in the can for two years before its theatrical release and was not a major box office success. No home video release for *Crime by Night*. It too shows up on Turner Classic Movies. Hopefully Jane Wyman fans are familiar with it. It'd be a fine finish to Parker's B days at Warner—her performance, loving mother slash femme fatale, is neat. There's one more B to go though.

Parker's final B-picture, *The Last Ride*, came out a month after *Crime by Night* and fittingly culminates her filmography to this point. D. Ross Lederman, who directed Parker's first film, *Busses Roar*, directs *The Last Ride*. Parker is third-billed, after *Busses Roar's* Richard Travis and *Crime by Night's* Charles Lang. They're brothers—one's a cop, one's a rubber runner (wartime rubber shortages, so another home front picture)—and Parker's the girl they both love. Jack La Rue and Cy Kendall costar.

The Last Ride's not an abject failure, but it's got a clunky script from Raymond L. Schrock. There are constant continuity problems, which is should be impossible in a fifty-six minute movie but *Last Ride* manages. Parker had Lang for a love interest in *Crime by Night* and Travis in *Mission to Moscow* so the love triangle should register. Except Parker only gets two scenes; hardly time for reunions or anything else. Travis is all right. There's nothing anyone could really do to improve *Last Ride*... the tires are just too low.

The film apparently didn't make much impression on release and has never been out on home video. None of the aforementioned B pictures are on home video and nothing makes *The Last Ride* stand out. Sorry, Richard Travis and Charles Lang. More, of all Parker's early films (her sixth after starting three years before), *The Last Ride* doesn't even manage to be a curiosity. And if you do watch it hoping for a nice early role for Parker, you'll be disappointed when she's barely in the film, regardless of billing.

Just a few weeks later, Warner released *The Very Thought of You*, featuring Parker's first leading role in an A picture. It's a home front picture, with more drama, less propaganda. Parker's a munition factory worker who has a whirlwind romance with GI on leave Dennis Morgan, culminating in marriage. Her family doesn't support Parker or the marriage; dating soldiers is a no no. The timely subplots include wartime infidelity and temptation. Dane Clark and Faye Emerson play the sidekicks (Clark to Morgan, Emerson to Parker). *Very Thought* would be Parker and Emerson's last Warner film together, after *Between Two Worlds* and *Crime by Night*.

The Very Thought of You is a deliberate family drama. Director Delmer Daves and Alvah Bessie's script is better than Daves's direction, but the cast is first-rate. Save leading man Dennis Morgan, who looks his part but doesn't have any depth. Parker's good but her part's a bland "good girl". Everyone else gets more, whether it's being awful, unfaithful, or just funny. The film drags—mostly because its not dramatic enough—but it's still quite good.

Very Thought of You also isn't out on home video. Apparently Warner—not even Warner Archive—thinks there are enough Parker or Dennis Morgan fans out there to warrant a release. Like all of Parker's film's to this point—feature and B—*Very Thought* does show up on Turner Classic Movies.

After the four film year of 1944, Parker slowed down. Her one film in 1945, *Pride of the Marines*, arrived almost exactly a year after *Very Thought of You*.

Marines, based on a true story, pairs Parker with John Garfield; while they shared scenes in *Between Two Worlds*, they didn't share story arcs. In *Marines*, Parker again plays the good girl. This time she cures Garfield of his aversion to romance and commitment. Then Pearl Harbor happens and Garfield joins up, distinguishing himself in the Pacific. He comes home wounded and lashes out at everyone, Parker included. The film reunites a lot of *Very Thought of You* principals, including director Delmer Daves, producer Jerry Wald, and main costar Dane Clark.

Overall, *Pride of the Marines* isn't successful. There's some excellent work from Daves—the sequences in the Pacific Theatre are a spellbinding nightmare—but Albert Maltz's script is thin. It's thin on Garfield's character, then it's thin on his rehabilitation. As a result, Garfield's nowhere near as effective as he needs to be and the film itself doesn't have enough heft. Parker's good, of course, having played this kind of part most of her career to this point. Sidekick Clark also does well, mixing dramatic with comedic.

The film was well-received on release—lots of praise for Garfield and Maltz's script was Oscar-nominated—but *Marines* fell into obscurity. Well, more forced into obscurity after the House Committee on Un-American Activities went after both Maltz and Garfield. The film never had a VHS release, but aired somewhat regularly on Turner Classic Movies. The film finally got its first home video release on DVD from Warner Archive, one of that label's first releases.

Parker's next film—her first of 1946—was *Of Human Bondage*. It came out about a year after *Marines* and introduced audiences to an Eleanor Parker much different than the Warner home front ingénue. As a cruel, vulgar Cockney waitress, Parker inadvertently bewitches medical student Paul Henreid, who'll do anything to win her. Once she realizes how much she can profit from his lust, she takes full advantage. Within some limits. He does disgust her after all. Director Edmund Goulding wasn't sure about Parker for the part (he'd wanted Ida Lupino) and tested Parker three times before casting her. *Bondage* sat on the shelf for a couple years. It was in the can in 1944 and could have provided a far more immediate contrast to Parker and Henreid's devoted lovers in *Between Two Worlds*. Another *Two Worlds* cast member—Edmund Gwenn—is in *Bondage*, but never onscreen with Parker.

Of Human Bondage, much like the source novel, is a slow moving affair. Parker's magnificent. Henreid's good—especially since he's never trying to make

himself likable—but it’s all about Parker, who sadly doesn’t get as much attention as she should. She’s not the protagonist, after all, just his main foil. Goulding gives Henreid and Parker a whole lot of room to work. His direction is patient and deliberate (though apparently much of the composition is the result post-production tinkering at Henreid’s request). Gwenn’s great in his supporting role, imbuing *Of Human Bondage* with a most unlikely quality—hopefulness.

Contemporary critics didn’t think much of the film, though Parker got good reviews. When MGM adapted the novel again in 1964, they bought up the rights to the 1946 version and kept it off television, effectively letting it become lost. Turner Classic Movies has been airing *Of Human Bondage* for many years, though apparently it’s never gotten enough viewers to get a Warner Archive release. That lack of release is unfortunate; *Of Human Bondage* is Parker’s first dramatic role of depth and the first time it’s clear there’s no way to cast her against type; she doesn’t have one.

Four months after *Of Human Bondage* came out and fizzled, Parker’s next film arrived. *Never Say Goodbye*, a romantic comedy, with Parker and Errol Flynn playing a divorced couple with a great daughter (Patti Brady) who both maybe want to fall in love again. With each other. James V. Kern directs the film, which is one of those late forties post-war screwball comedies.

Never Say Goodbye has a strong open and a charming cast. Not just Parker and Flynn, but S.Z. Sakall and Hattie McDaniel. After the strong open, things aren’t as good. Parker and Flynn don’t have much to work with and despite both being charming, they don’t have much chemistry. Both are quite glamorous, however. And Brady’s adorable. It’s a perfectly okay comedy. Nothing more.

Contemporary critics were lukewarm but positive in their reviews of *Never Say Goodbye*, though it wasn’t a hit on release. No doubt thanks to Flynn’s presence, the film actually had a VHS release. It was Parker’s earliest film to be released on that format. Like everything else, it airs on Turner Classic Movies. Warner Archive has also got a DVD out. So *Never Say Goodbye* is reasonably accessible. Or, at least, it’s been accessible for longer.

The following year, 1947, Parker appeared in two films. The first, reuniting her with *Goodbye* costar Errol Flynn, was *Escape Me Never*. Parker is third-billed—behind Flynn and Ida Lupino—and plays the other woman to Lupino; they both want Flynn’s attentions. Flynn’s a struggling composer. Lupino’s a broke single mother. Parker’s a wealthy bachelorette. Gig Young is Parker’s other

romantic interest and Flynn's boring brother. The action takes place in turn of the century Europe. Peter Godfrey directs from Thames Williamson's script.

Escape Me Never is terrible. Lupino's annoying, Flynn's bad, Parker's lost, Young's probably the best. Williamson's script is awful. Terrible dialogue—which can't help the actors any—but also terrible characterization. The parts are too thin. It's impossible to take Flynn seriously as moody, broke, and irresistible to all women. It's additionally impossible to take him seriously as a composer. The film's a complete misfire; no one can survive it.

Contemporary critics were not kind to *Escape Me Never*, though Bosley Crowthers of The New York Times did take a moment to send his "deepest sympathy" to Parker for having to be involved in the picture. Also presumably thanks to Flynn's presence, the film did get a VHS release. Warner Archive has out a DVD as well. And Turner Classic Movies plays it. So it's been accessible over the years, it's just no one should ever see it.

Though Parker is probably at her most glamorous in the *Escape Me Never*; definitely of her Warner forties roles.

Parker's second film of the year, *The Voice of the Turtle*, came out on Christmas Day (in New York, it went wide in early 1948). Irving Rapper directs the picture, an adaptation of John Van Druten's extremely popular stage play. Parker plays a variation of her "good girl" home front role. Instead of being all good, she's having an affair with Kent Smith (though, thanks to the Code, it's never clear Smith's married). He dumps her and Parker mopes until her free-living pal Eve Arden sticks her babysitting soldier-on-leave Ronald Reagan. Will he and Parker fall in love before their weekend is over?

Turtle's screenplay, from Van Druten and Charles Hoffman, neuters the original stage play, which was all about Parker's character not wanting to get horizontal with Reagan after her affair went badly. The result is a strange mix of screwball comedy and muted melodrama. Director Rapper doesn't seem to know how to do either. Parker's good, but the film gives a lot more material to Reagan (and Arden and even Smith). Reagan's fine. The film's got excellent production values, so it always looks like it ought to be better, even when it isn't. Without knowing about the stage play, *Turtle* is a kind of confusing, talky romantic comedy. Knowing about the stage play... well, it's a shame Parker didn't get to play the role as written for stage.

Voice of the Turtle was well-received on release. Good box office, good

reviews. It was sold to television in the fifties under the title *One for the Book* and remained identified with that reissue title for decades. So long, in fact, it aired on Turner Classic Movies under that title (and is still listed as such in their database). The Warner Archive DVD release restores the original, *Voice of the Turtle* title. The film never had a VHS release. Despite its contemporary popularity—and quick sale to television—*Turtle*'s mostly a footnote in Parker's filmography. As in, she made a movie with Ronald Reagan.

The Woman in White, released in May 1948, reunited Parker with two *Escape Me Never* principals—director Peter Godfrey and actor Gig Young. The film's set in the nineteenth century on an English country estate, making it one of Parker's three Warner films not set in modernity. Alexis Smith, who costarred in *Of Human Bondage* but never shared a scene with Parker, is second-billed. Parker, after six years and twelve films, finally gets top-billing for *Woman in White*. And she definitely earns it, playing two roles in the film. Sydney Greenstreet, who was sympathetic in *Between Two Worlds* opposite Parker, plays her scheming, odious nemesis in *Woman*. The only times he isn't plotting against or tormenting Parker, he's tormenting his own wife, played by Agnes Moorehead. John Emery, who had a small part in *Turtle*, appears in the film as well.

For the most part, *The Woman in White* is a phenomenal film. Great performances, particularly from Parker (who you get to see toggle between two different yet intricately tied roles) and Greenstreet. Moorehead's excellent as well. Godfrey brings some humor to the dark psychological terrors. After opening with a fine romance for Parker (in one of her roles) and Young, *Woman* skips ahead to Young romancing Smith with far less chemistry. Even Max Steiner's outstanding score takes some hits as the film winds down. Shakiness aside, *The Woman in White* is a success, with exquisite performances and filmmaking.

The film wasn't well-received—at least, not by The New York Times—in 1948. *The Woman in White* never had a VHS release. For a long time, Turner Classic Movies was the only way to see it. Now, however, Warner Archive has put the film out on DVD, allowing people to see one of Parker's finest forties performances. Sorry, two of Parker's finest forties performances. She's superb in both roles.

A couple months before *Woman in White*, Parker had her first child; she took time off to be a mom, indifferently racking up suspensions from Warner for

refusing roles. As a result of the break, she didn't have any movies come out in 1949. She was supposed to do *The Hasty Heart*, which would've reunited her with *Turtle's* Ronald Reagan; Patricia Neal took the role instead.

When Parker did return, it was for a role opposite Humphrey Bogart in 1950's *Chain Lightning*. Bogie is a WWII bomber pilot who goes from running a flight school to testing a top secret new fighter jet. Parker plays the love interest, who knows Bogie from during the war and they never resolved their romance. Now they find themselves in a love triangle with fellow test pilot Richard Whorf. Raymond Massey plays Bogart's demanding boss. Stuart Heisler directs the film, Bogart's final picture for Warner Bros.

Lightning has a lazy script and runs too short—ninety-five minutes—but it's perfectly fine. Good special effects, solid direction from Heisler, good acting from Bogart, Parker, and Massey. There's little character development and the whole thing hinges on Bogart's star power. He delivers, with Parker holding her own opposite him; it's a shame their only pairing is such wanting material. The action-packed ending is particularly tense thanks to the filmmaking (and Bogart's performance).

Even on release, critics recognized *Chain Lightning's* general competence, lack of ambition, and passable quality. It doesn't appear to have made much impression at the box office, however. While both Bogart and Parker were nearing the end of their time with Warner Bros., Bogart's career was slowing as Parker's was about to pick up. Thanks to it being a Bogart movie—albeit a lesser one—*Chain Lightning* got a VHS release in the early nineties. The film airs on Turner Classic Movies, like all of Parker's Warner movies. Warner Archive has put out a DVD. *Chain Lightning* has been readily accessible for years, though it seems to still make as slight an impression as it did on release.

Four months after *Chain Lightning*, Warner released *Caged*, featuring Parker's first Oscar-nominated performance. She plays a naive, pregnant young widow who ends up in a woman's penitentiary. Parker's top-billed (with *Woman in White* costar Agnes Moorehead getting second). Moorehead's the understanding warden. Parker finds sympathetic fellow inmates, but runs afoul of Hope Emerson's corrupt, vicious matron. John Cromwell directs the film, Jerry Wald produces; five years earlier, Parker starred in Wald productions *Very Thought of You* and *Pride of the Marines*.

Caged is a phenomenal film. Parker's performance is exhilarating as the

prison slowly and irrevocably crushes her. Cromwell's direction is outstanding, the supporting performances are outstanding. The film smartly works social commentary into its constraints—the entire thing takes place in the prison, except maybe the opening titles. Excellent script from Virginia Kellogg; it circles Parker as it regards her, then closes in to make her protagonist. It's great.

So it's unfortunate instead of being remembered for Parker's performance or Cromwell's direction or Kellogg's script, *Caged's* initial legacy was as a camp "classic". When Warner Home Video put out *Caged* (not Warner Archive, making *Caged* Parker's only non-MOD—made on demand—DVD release of her Warner films), they released it in their "Cult Camp Classic" series. The film had developed a reputation over the years as a campy "women in prison" picture. Hopefully enough people have seen *Caged* to correct its reputation, which was never easy to find before the DVD (until Turner Classic Movies started airing it). When Warner Archive rereleased the film on DVD, they thankfully did so without the "Cult Camp Classic" banner.

Contemporary critics were somewhat cool to *Caged*, but it still received a number of Academy Award nominations in addition to Parker's. While she lost the Oscar, Parker did win the Venice Film Festival's best actress award for her performance.

Three Secrets, Parker's final film of 1950 came out in October, four months after *Caged*. Parker is top-billed followed by Patricia Neal and Ruth Roman. There's a plane crash and a little boy is stranded on a mountain. All three women put a baby up for adoption; one of them is his mother. Parker's the good girl with a past secret. Neal's a divorced reporter. Roman's a former chorus girl. The film goes into flashback for each woman's story, comes together for the big finale reveal. Robert Wise directs.

Secrets is an okay lower budget melodrama. While a Warner Bros. release, it was a United States Pictures production, which apparently means less money. And in bad places too, like sets. The acting from the leads is all good. Parker's secret is a home front related one so she's back in that role, which appropriately caps her Warner career. Wise's direction could be a lot better. But the script's not great either.

Three Secrets wasn't Parker's biggest hit of 1950 (turns out *Caged* was the most successful at the time) and it didn't thrill critics, but it was a very easy Parker film to find on VHS. Warner either didn't keep or have home video

rights. Republic Pictures put *Three Secrets* out on VHS in the late eighties and kept it in print for over ten years. The rights issues also meant it took *Three Secrets* a long time to get a DVD release, but it got a blu-ray release the same day. The film also had a TV movie remake in the late nineties (making it the only Parker film with any kind of remake).

Eleanor Parker's Warner Bros. career produced a great film (*Caged*), some good ones, some okay ones, a number of phenomenal performances, and a lot of good ones. It only produced one abject stinker (*Escape Me Never*) and the failure had nothing to do with Parker.

After Parker's return for the 1950 releases, it became clear Warner didn't have the projects Parker wanted. She was out of her contract before her first film of the year, *Chain Lightning* was released. The studio had cast her right off in the naive home front good girl part and left her there for almost her entire career. Sure, *Chain Lightning* at least made her a wartime nurse, but *Three Secrets* stepped it back again. In between, Parker ripped apart the naive good girl in *Caged*. She'd already shown she could do entirely different kinds of roles—*Of Human Bondage* and *The Woman in White*—but she'd never gotten to do naive home front good girl in a great movie. *Voice of the Turtle* should have let Parker do something amazing with the trope; shame it doesn't.

Then Parker went full costume melodrama with *Woman in White* and *Chain Lightning* adequately sidestepped her previous Warner persona. Parker's *Caged* performance meets her Warner persona head-on. *Caged* isn't just a great performance, it's Parker showing how much further she could have taken any previous part, if the films had just been there for her.

And now it's actually pretty easy to watch Parker's development as an actor. All of her films available on DVD feature good or better parts for Parker. Well, not *Escape Me Never*. Unfortunately, it's still Turner Classic Movies-only for *Of Human Bondage*. Maybe someday.

Caged is the place to start though. Seeing Parker progress isn't near as important as seeing her in *Caged*.

Posted. 27 November 2017.

Weblink. <https://thestopbutton.com/2017/11/27/sum-up-ep-pt1-2/>.

Gallery 1: 1942-50



Parker clerks in *Busses Roar*.



Busses Roar: Richard Fraser and Elisabeth Fraser (no relation) cause a hold up in Parker's line while Richard Travis looks on.



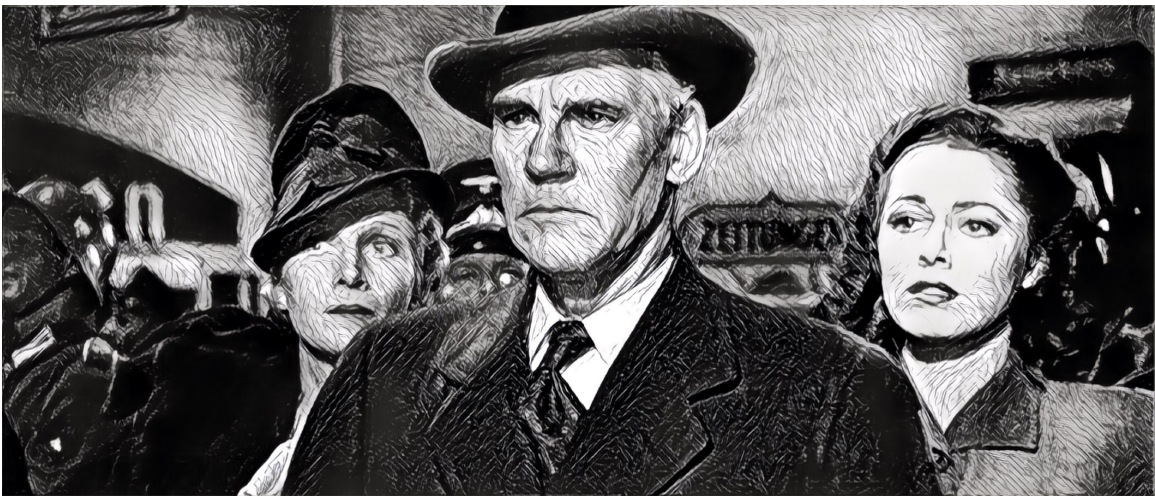
Parker looks for *The Mysterious Doctor*.



Mysterious Doctor: Everyone's concerned for Parker after she's injured, but not enough to listen to her before.



Parker in *Mission to Moscow*.



Ann Harding, Walter Huston, and Parker travel for work in *Mission*.



Paul Henreid and Parker in *Between Two Worlds*.



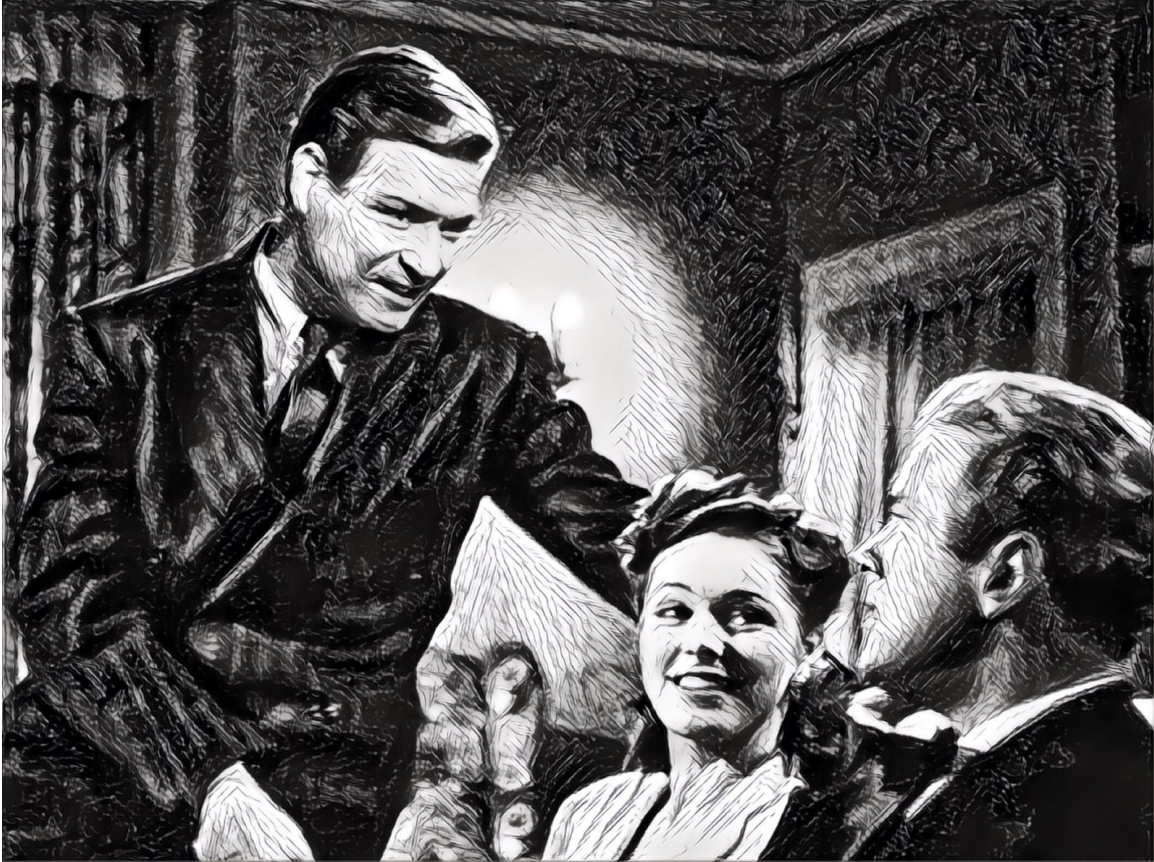
Between Two Worlds: Sydney Greenstreet, Dennis King, Parker, Edmund Gwenn, and Henreid.



Parker gives ex-husband Jerome Cowan as much consideration as he deserves in *Crime by Night*.



Crime by Night: Parker and Charles Lang.



The Last Ride's ostensible love triangle: Travis, Parker, and Lang.



Last Ride: Parker serves the boys dinner; before she gets to eat, she answers the phone and exits the picture.



Dennis Morgan and Parker in *The Very Thought of You*.



The Very Thought of You: Every time Henry Travers has to calm Beulah Bondi on Parker's behalf, an angel gets its wings.



Parker and John Garfield in *The Pride of the Marines*.



The Pride of the Marines: Garfield, Parker, and the metaphor of a fallen Christmas tree.



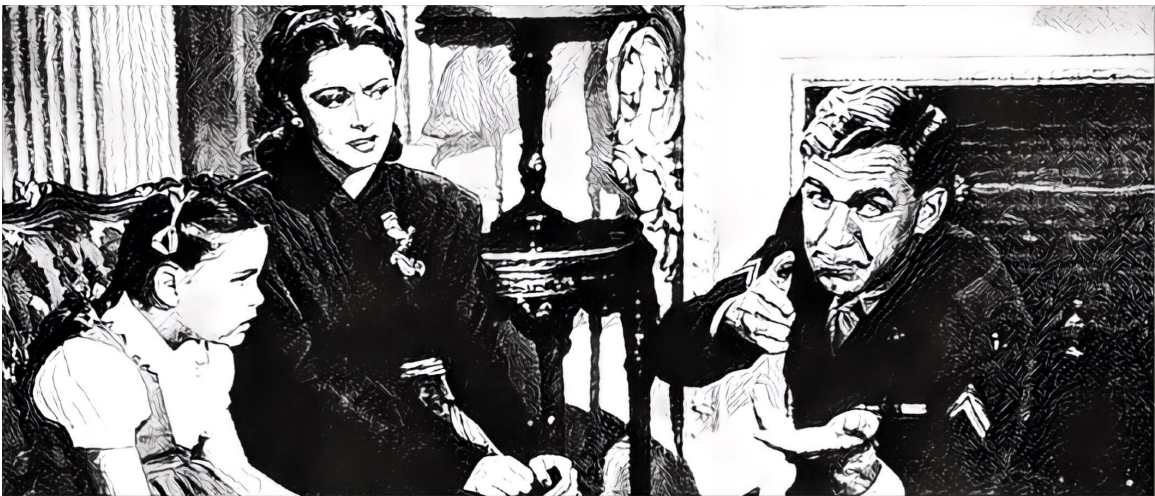
Meet Mildred Rogers – Parker in *Of Human Bondage*.



Of Human Bondage: Parker and Henreid.



Never Say Goodbye: Errol Flynn and Parker.



Never Say Goodbye: Parker isn't sure about Patti Brady's attempt to fix her up with Forrest Tucker.



Ladies can't resist a man with an accordion; Flynn and Parker in *Escape Me Never*.



Escape Me Never: Ida Lupino and Parker face off.



Future “family values” man Ronald Reagan helps Parker into her dress (in hopes of getting her out of it) in *The Voice of the Turtle*.



The Voice of the Turtle: Parker’s blissful, Eve Arden’s not convinced.



Alexis Smith and Parker in *The Woman in White*.



The Woman in White revealed to Smith, Parker, and Gig Young.



Parker looks to Roy Roberts and Roberts looks to the sky in *Chain Lightning*.



Chain Lightning: Parker and Humphrey Bogart.



Parker with her newborn in Caged.



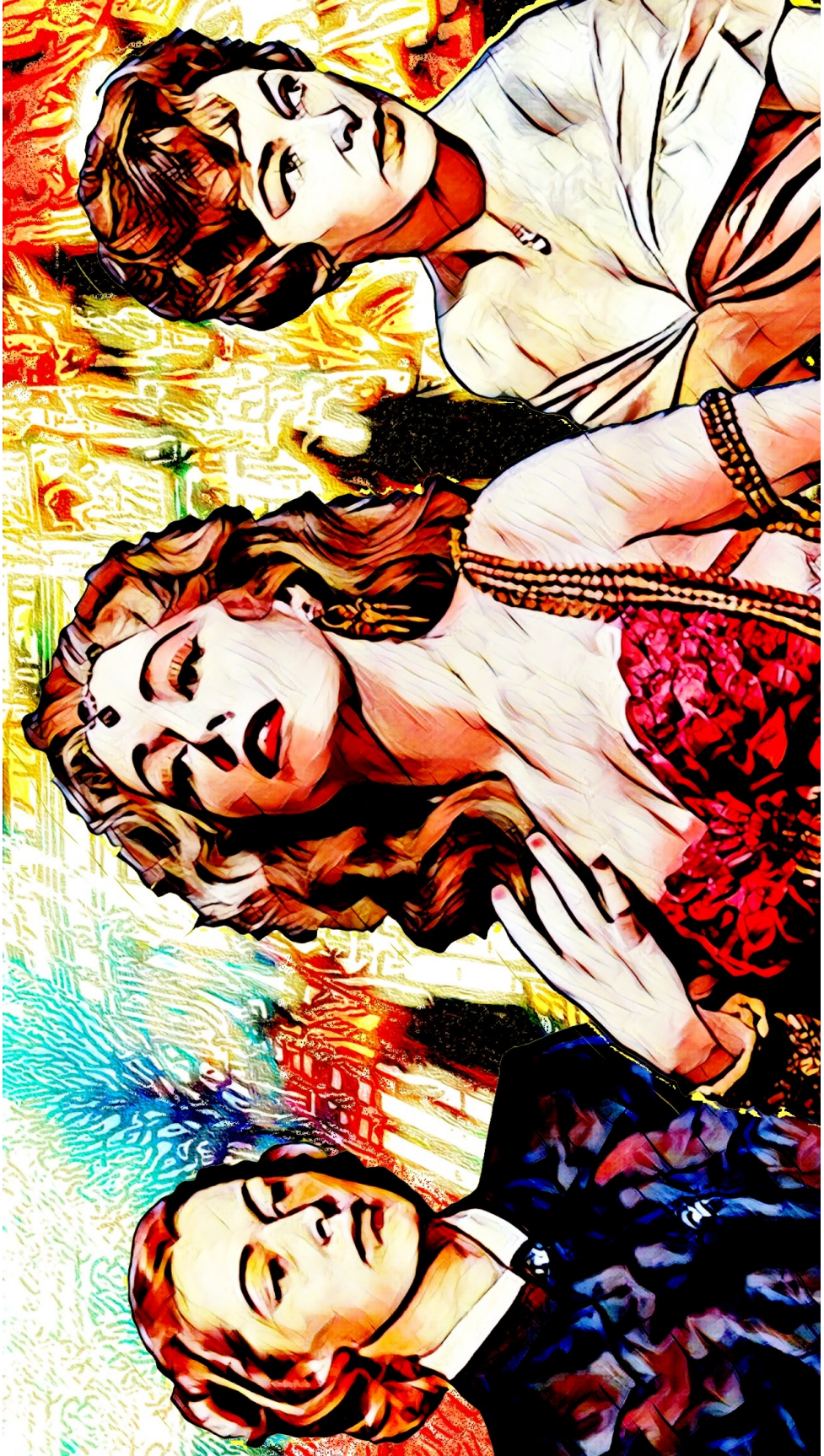
Caged: Parker.



Ruth Roman, Patricia Neal, and Parker share their *Three Secrets*.



Three Secrets: Parker and Neal.



Part 2: Technicolor

When Eleanor Parker left her Warner Bros. contract in early 1950, she did so before any of her films of that year released. There were three—*Chain Lightning*, *Caged*, and *Three Secrets*. All three were successful. She was top-billed on the latter two (and second-billed only to Bogart in *Lightning*). She'd get an Oscar nomination for Warner's *Caged*, only she wasn't Warner's star anymore. Parker was going into the early fifties a free agent; nine years into her career, she was finally going to be able to pick roles, not have them assigned and have to refuse them until she got good ones.

Parker's comeback year of 1950 had been a financial success in addition to critical. She didn't have any releases in 1949 and the films where she was top-billed (*Caged* and *Three Secrets*) did better box office than her pairing with Bogie in *Chain Lightning*. She had received her first Oscar nomination for *Caged*, where she was top-billed pretty much by herself, and it was the biggest hit of the three. She would be just as busy as a free agent, with three 1951 releases.

Parker's first film of 1951 was a Technicolor biopic for Columbia, *Valentino*. Directed by Lewis Allen, the film had been in development hell since the late 1930s. Producer Edward Small just couldn't get it made. When he finally did, it was with unknown Anthony Dexter in the title role. Parker is top-billed, however, as a (fictional) silent era superstar. Third-billed Richard Carlson is the director who loves Parker but knows Dexter is the superstar waiting to happen. Joseph Calleia plays Dexter's sidekick. Patricia Medina is there to give Parker and Dexter a second love triangle (in addition to the Parker-Dexter-Carlson one).

Valentino is a terrible film. Dexter can't act, but even if he could, George Bruce's script is terrible. Even if the script weren't terrible, Allen's direction is bad. Even if Allen's direction wasn't bad, the budget would be a problem. Thankfully, they don't cheap on Parker's glamorous wardrobe, but everything else is desperately cheap. Well, not the Technicolor. The Technicolor is something—and it's Parker's first time in a color picture since her Warner Bros. short subjects in 1942. She does what she can in *Valentino*, to some success in the first act when she's the lead, but there's only so much she can do.

When the film came out in March 1951—three weeks before Parker didn't win Best Actress for *Caged* at the Oscars—*Valentino* bombed with audiences and critics alike. Dexter, ostensibly primed for Hollywood stardom, did not get his

second role for Columbia and producer Small—they were all going to remake *The Sheik*. Small managed to hang on at Columbia (*Valentino* had been his first film in a two year contract) for ten more films. Intentionally or not, Parker never appeared in another Columbia Pictures theatrical release (though she would do some TV work for them in the seventies and eighties). Silent screen star Alice Terry (who was part of Parker's amalgam character) sued, Valentino's siblings sued—Columbia settled out of court. The film's never been released on home video in any format, which is no great loss. Other than it being Parker's first Technicolor feature—with technically superior photography from Harry Stradling Sr.—and for her having a phenomenal wardrobe.

Parker's next film, *A Millionaire for Christy*, came out in September. Produced by Parker's then husband Bert E. Friedlob, *Christy* is a screwball comedy with Parker as legal secretary out to marry—you guessed it—a millionaire. Fred MacMurray is the millionaire in question, though he's already engaged. Chaos and comedy ensue, with Kay Buckley and Richard Carlson along for the ride. In addition to Carlson, the *Valentino* mini-reunion includes Harry Stradling again photographing—though this time in black and white. Carlson's stuck in a love triangle again, but not involving Parker—Buckley's thrown him over to marry MacMurray. George Marshall directs the film, Parker's first (and only) 20th Century Fox release of the fifties.

Christy's first half hour isn't impressive—instead of doing a new screwball comedy, the first third of the ninety-minute film recycles old screwball tropes. After the thirty minute mark, however, *Christy* immediately improves, all thanks to leads Parker, Carlson, and MacMurray. Director Marshall has problems throughout; *Christy* occasionally will come off like violent film noir, not madcap comedy. A lot of the action takes place on location at the Marion Davies Beach House in Santa Monica and Marshall just can't seem to figure out how to shoot there. Parker and MacMurray's chemistry (eventually) helps a lot. MacMurray's best opposite Parker (versus his own subplots) and Parker's awesome (after that first third). Plus Carlson. Carlson gets a far better material than in his last outing with Parker. Still, the problems weigh the film.

Contemporary critics greeted the film with muted praise—though Louella Parsons chose Parker's performance as the “Best of the Month” for her *Cosmopolitan* column, surprised (and delighted) to see Parker so ably toggle from drama to comedy. The film had some behind the scenes drama—with Friedlob apparently not paying MacMurray or Parker on time, then turning

around and selling television rights without getting the cast royalties (despite being married to Friedlob another two years, Parker never made another film for him)—and there were some cuts made to the film. Maybe they'd have helped, maybe not. Audiences weren't particularly warm to *Christy* either; it was less successful at the box office than *Valentino*. *Christy* never had a VHS release, but did air on television. Hopefully with residuals being paid. Warner Archive has released the film on DVD and it's available streaming as well. So *Christy* isn't hard to see and is more than worth a look for one of Parker's rare(ish) comedic roles.

She returned to drama just under two months later with William Wyler's *Detective Story*. Earlier in the year (before *Valentino* came out), Parker had signed a non-exclusive, one picture a year contract with Paramount. *Detective Story* was her first role for them. Based on the play by Pulitzer Prize winner Sidney Kingsley, the film stars Kirk Douglas as a hard boiled New York cop who has a very bad day. Parker's his wife and the one bright spot in his life. William Bendix plays his partner. *Story* takes place almost entirely in Douglas and Bendix's police precinct, with an assorted cast of characters—ranging from first-time shoplifter Lee Grant to career burglar Joseph Wiseman to abortionist George Macready—populating. Robert Wyler and Philip Yordan adapted the play.

Detective Story is a truly outstanding motion picture. Before even getting to the acting, there's Wyler's direction. He takes the play adaptation very seriously, using the film medium to inspect the play and its characters as their day unfolds. It's stunningly produced. And now the acting. Parker gets the best part, she's the subject of the film (without knowing it) and the only one who can tame Douglas's savage beast. Douglas is a fantastic combination of terrifying and reassuring. The acting is spectacular all around, with Wyler purposefully showcasing his cast's abilities. *Detective Story*—and its cast—spellbind.

The film got excellent reviews on release—though New York Times critic Bosley Crowther (wrongly, quite frankly) wasn't impressed with Parker. The Academy disagreed with Crowther (because he's so outrageously wrong), nominating Parker for Best Actress (a year after her nomination for *Caged*); the film got three more Oscar nominations—direction, writing, and supporting actress (Lee Grant). It didn't win any, though Grant did win Best Actress at Cannes. Three years later, Douglas and Parker would reunite for the Lux Radio adaptation. *Detective Story* never had a VHS release—though the film's strong reputation never lessened between its theatrical release and, finally, its DVD

release in 2005. Paramount was never good at getting its classics out on home video, so the film's occasional television airings were notable events. While the DVD has gone out of print, the film's available streaming. Thank goodness.

Seven months after *Detective Story*, in June 1952, Parker would return to screens—in color again—in MGM's *Scaramouche*. The film's a pre-French Revolution Technicolor adventure epic with Stewart Granger as a swashbuckler who occasionally acts with a traveling troupe. The film's based on Rafael Sabatini's 1921 novel, which Metro had successfully adapted at the time, making the film Parker's fourth remake. Parker's the glamorous, gorgeous female lead in the troupe and Granger's lover; though they're frequently on the outs due to his 18th century French male bullshit. Janet Leigh plays noble bastard Granger's half-sister; he has to protect her from villain (and vicious swordsman) Mel Ferrer. Aristocrat Ferrer's out to destroy the burgeoning revolutionaries—pragmatically murdering them—but he's also trying to marry Leigh. George Sidney directs, Charles Rosher photographs the resplendent Technicolor.

Scaramouche is a thrilling delight. It's deliberately plotted, introducing top-billed stars Granger and Parker after Leigh and Ferrer, with director Sidney carefully guiding viewers through the film. While a swashbuckling adventure (with a lot of comedy), *Scaramouche* also has a lot of story; it needs time to set up its location and its characters for the impending revolution. Lots of inherent (and implied) ground situation before the film gets to introducing Granger (much less Parker). Parker's luminous, something she enthusiastically incorporates into her performance, and she and Granger are wonderful together. That chemistry is a testament to her professionalism—many years later she revealed Granger was the only costar she couldn't stand (though few could stand Granger, apparently). Granger, regardless of his off-screen demeanor, is great. Ferrer's a truly vile bad guy—he and Granger have either the longest or one of the longest film sword fights. Leigh's good. Everything's good in *Scaramouche*.

And *Scaramouche* was a big hit, with both audiences and critics. Bosley Crowther, in the New York Times, was thrilled with Parker in this one. As was MGM—they signed her to a five-year contract just after the film's release (they already had her next film in the can). The film got its first home video release in the late 1980s with a Criterion Collection LaserDisc; MGM got it out on VHS a few years later. Warner released a DVD in 2003—*Scaramouche* has always been one of Parker's most accessible films—and Warner Archive has since put it back out. It's also available streaming. Despite all those releases and its constant

availability (TCM also airs the film), *Scaramouche* seems to have something of a muted reputation these days. Or maybe it just doesn't have its deserved, ever-present boisterous one.

Parker's next film for MGM, *Above and Beyond*, arrived right after New Year's Day 1953 (though its premiere was on New Year's Eve 1952). The black and white film, directed by Melvin Frank and Norman Panama, tells the true-ish story of Paul Tibbets (Robert Taylor), pilot of the Enola Gay—which dropped the Hiroshima bomb—often from the perspective of wife Parker. Much of the film involves the couple's marital tensions, brought on by Taylor's secretiveness and the general strain of living on an airbase during a top secret project. Second-billed Parker narrates the film, scripted by Beirne Lay Jr. and the directors. James Whitmore plays the calming base security officer, who ends up Parker's confidant. Sort of. Alongside Parker's story line is Taylor's, from the Manhattan Project to the decision to drop the bomb.

Above and Beyond is outstanding drama. The filmmakers give Parker a lot more to do scene-to-scene, but Taylor ends up with the better part. He's got weight of the world on his shoulders and can't express its toil externally. It's got to simmer throughout the entire picture—Parker's absent from the screen at times (though present through the narration), but Taylor's almost always there. Frank and Panama go through the historical material matter-of-fact. There's a lot of history procedural, meaning the somewhat rare scenes between Parker and Taylor—usually she's homemaking alone and he's doing his secret Manhattan Project stuff—their scenes together have to succeed (as their relationship is the whole point of the film). And their scenes do succeed. They're always fantastic; the actors and their scenes. Frank and Panama get it.

Contemporary critics were lukewarm to *Above and Beyond* overall, usually liking Taylor and the military stuff, not so much Parker or the marriage drama. The film did well at the box office and made the National Board of Review's ten best list for 1952 (meaning it made the list before its general theatrical release). Parker and Taylor's chemistry was so successful they went on to make two more films together at MGM. *Above and Beyond* came out on VHS in the mid-nineties, aired on Turner Classic Movies, and was in the initial batch of Warner Archive's DVD releases. It's now also available streaming. While readily available over the years, it's rarely gotten much attention, which is unfortunate. It ought to be seen.

It would almost be New Year's again before Parker's next film arrived. Released in December 1953, *Escape from Fort Bravo*—in Ansicolor—is Parker's first Western. While she shot scenes for *They Died with Their Boots On* as her first Warner Bros. assignment in 1941, they ended up on the cutting room floor. *Fort Bravo* is a Civil War Western, set in a Union prison camp; William Holden is the ruthless captain, Parker is the fetching Confederate spy, John Forsythe is the imprisoned rebel commander. The action changes from prison break to Native American siege. Holden and Parker's romantic feelings for one another complicate matters. John Sturges directs, William Demarest and William Campbell costar.

Fort Bravo is speedy, excellent Western. Holden's outstanding, juxtaposed against alter ego Forsythe, with both men fighting over Parker. Parker plays her part quite well—once everyone's under siege, she has less dramatic work (at least as far as her reluctant but all-consuming romance with Holden)—with Sturges keeping everything moving. The film's nimble in both its action and romance thanks to Frank Fenton's screenplay; Parker gets enough personality to hold her own against Holden. *Fort Bravo*'s got great production values, beautiful Robert Surtees photography, and fine (or better) performances.

Critics didn't have an agreed consensus on *Escape from Fort Bravo*. New York Times critic Howard Thompson had little use for the actors' performances save Holden; his observations of Parker's contributions were pure objectification. Time Magazine did like the film, however. And it was a box office hit. *Fort Bravo* was also MGM's first time doing their own wide-screen process (*Bravo* had initially been intended for 3D but, alas, that craze had passed before filming began). *Fort Bravo* came out on video in the late nineties and it aired on Turner Classic Movies. When Warner released the DVD in 2008, *Fort Bravo* got its first widescreen home video release. It's now available streaming as well. Like most pre-sixties, non-revisionist Westerns, *Fort Bravo* seems to have been forgotten, which is too bad. Parker had intentionally avoided the genre while under contract at Warner in the forties; she waited for a good one.

It was back to Paramount for Parker's next picture, *The Naked Jungle*, which came out in March 1954. Top-billed—over rising “action hero” Charlton Heston—Parker plays a mail order bride who gets more than she bargained for when she arrives at Heston's South American cocoa plantation. Rugged, cold, socially inept, and now super-rich (the film takes place in 1901), Heston wants a demure, submissive wife. Parker's anything but. While they're waging marital warfare, a

bunch of killer ants attack. Directed by Byron Haskin and produced by George Pal, *Naked Jungle* starts a romantic drama and ends up a large-scale action thriller. The film's based on Carl Stephenson's short story, *Leiningen Versus the Ants*, which had a very successful radio adaptation in the late forties. William Conrad, who voiced the Heston part on radio, costars in the film.

The Naked Jungle is fantastic. Haskin's not the best director for the drama or the action, but he's solid and can execute the film's phenomenal special effects. Parker's performance is great, with the screenplay giving her a whole lot to do. Her character isn't in the source material so the great writing is all screenwriters Ben Maddow and Ranald MacDougall (Philip Yordan, who co-adapted *Detective Story*, fronts for Maddow in the credits). The film takes its time working through the relationship problems with Heston and Parker before getting to the ants. Drama then action. It all hinges on Parker though. Without her, it's a fine action movie. With her, it's this strange, wonderful genre period picture. One gorgeously photographed in Technicolor by Ernest Laszlo.

The film was a solid hit on release and well-reviewed (at least by Bosley Crowther at The New York Times). It was, however, Parker's last (and only second) film under her non-exclusive Paramount contract. The Paramount home video division got *Naked Jungle* out fairly early, releasing the film on VHS and LaserDisc in the late eighties. They got it out on DVD in the mid-aughts; they eventually did let it go out of print, with Warner Archive taking over distribution of the film for a while. Both releases are now out of print, but the film is still available streaming. *Naked Jungle* has never seemed to have had much modern awareness or appreciation, even though it's been readily accessible for much of the home video era.

Parker's next film—back at MGM—was another period adventure. *Valley of the Kings* came out summer 1954, reuniting Parker with Taylor in the story of rival archeologists out to loot as much Egyptian treasure as they can. Sort of. Taylor's the good guy archeologist, Carlos Thompson is the bad guy archeologist. Thompson's married to Parker, but if the billings are any indication (Thompson's third-billed, the font half the size of Taylor and Parker's), there might be some romance brewing for Taylor and Parker. Robert Pirosh directed the film, which shot (some) on location in Egypt—with great Robert Surtees photography; Pirosh also co-wrote the script with Karl Tunberg.

Valley of the Kings is not a good movie. It manages to be too short but still

boring. The script is bad, the direction is bad. It's pretty enough, with Surtees Eastmancolor, but the film is a substantial letdown given it reunites Parker and Taylor. Taylor's excellent, which is its own achievement given the inconsistency of the script. Parker, unfortunately, gets done in by that inconsistency—the script significantly changes her character in the third act and then manages to make things worse as the film wraps up. Thompson is awful. *Kings's* second half rallies quite a bit, but nowhere near enough to save the film.

Contemporary critics liked the Egyptian location shooting—*Valley of the Kings* was one of the first major Hollywood productions to film there (first or third, depending on the source)—but stayed mum on the rest. A.H. Weiler, writing for *The New York Times*, indifferently spoils the film's ending while enthusiastically complimenting the visuals. Audiences apparently didn't want to see the Egyptian locales enough to flock to theaters; *Valley of the Kings* didn't make its money back, even with better foreign grosses than domestic. It cost way too much for a ninety minute trifle. The difficult filming experience did encourage Pirosh to give up the director's chair, so at least some good came out of it. MGM put the film out on VHS in the mid-nineties; Warner Archive got a DVD release out twenty years later. Turner Classic Movies aired it in the interim, which is both good and bad. You want Parker's films to be accessible, but not so much *Valley of the Kings*. The film ruins Parker's streak of excellent films starting with *Detective Story*, after all. And utterly wastes one of her three pairings with Taylor.

That last pairing would be *Many Rivers to Cross*, Parker's first of three 1955 releases; *Many Rivers* came out in February, a Frontier romantic comedy. Parker's a frontier woman who sets her sights on trapper Taylor. Hilarity, high jinks, and Frontier intrigue ensue, often involving Parker's family. Victor McLaglen plays her father; she's got four protective brothers—though Parker can handle herself—and a suitor (Alan Hale Jr.) she's not interested in. Taylor's trapper is just passing through; he's not the marrying kind. Parker's going to change his mind. Roy Rowland directs.

Besides being a Parker and Taylor pairing (and their last), having two "Gilligan's Island" cast members (in addition to "Skipper" Hale, "Professor" Russell Johnson plays one of Parker's brothers), and some gross racism against Native Americans, there's not a lot to distinguish *Many Rivers to Cross*. The acting's solid all around and it's fun to see Parker in this kind of role. It's just nowhere near as impressive as it ought to be, certainly not as Parker's first

CinemaScope outing.

While MGM didn't have much faith in *Many Rivers to Cross*—releasing it on a double-bill by the time it got to New York City—the film turned a profit at the box office. New York Times critic Howard Thompson didn't have many compliments—not even for Parker's appearance this time; he much preferred the other half of the bill, *The Pirates of Tripoli*. The Variety critic wasn't particularly impressed either—though they were a tad nicer about *Rivers* than Thompson. The film never had a VHS release, no doubt saving it from some terrible pan-and-scanning; it did air on Turner Classic Movies. It got something of a hidden gem reputation—Parker as a frontier woman, Taylor as her romantic prey, how could it not. Warner Home Video put it out in the late aughts, so at least it's accessible now. It's also available streaming. But an inglorious conclusion for the Parker and Taylor trilogy (though still a marked improvement over *Valley of the Kings*) and not the best start to Parker's 1955 releases.

Five months later, MGM released Parker's next film, *Interrupted Melody*, in Technicolor and CinemaScope. Directed by Curtis Bernhardt and produced by Jack Cummings (who also produced *Many Rivers*—Parker stormed his office to convince him she was right for *Melody*), the film adapts Australian soprano Marjorie Lawrence's life story, specifically her battle with polio, which paralyzed her at the height of her career. Parker plays Lawrence, Glenn Ford plays her husband. Young Roger Moore shows up for a bit as Parker's brother, but the film is really Parker and Ford's show. American soprano Eileen Farrell (uncredited) does the singing for Parker; on set, however, opera novice Parker “screamed” the songs (according to Cummings), which led to the film's remarkable lip-syncing.

Interrupted Melody is a contender for Parker's finest lead performance. The film—fueled by William Ludwig and Sonya Levien's script—toggles between her and Ford, so it's good Ford is excellent as well. It's an outstanding production—the scale of the opera houses, the diva costumes, Joseph Ruttenberg and Paul Vogel's gorgeous color photography. At the center of it all is Parker, who's got a lot to do. She's the outward facing character, Ford's the inward. Bernhardt's direction is agile—the operas, the romance, the polio treatments, the rocky marriage—and always good. Parker's performance in *Interrupted Melody* was her favorite and for good reason.

Interrupted Melody was a hit on release, both with audiences and critics.

Bosley Crowther at the New York Times was a big fan of the film (pretty much saying the same as above, only with some complaints about CinemaScope framing). The film received three Academy Award nominations—Best Actress, Best Writing, and Best Costume Design. Ludwig and Levien won for their script. *Melody* would be Parker's final Oscar nomination. MGM/UA put *Melody* out on VHS in the mid-nineties, following it up with an LaserDisc release a few years later. The LaserDisc was letterboxed, preserving the beautiful CinemaScope frame Crowther didn't like. Turner Classic Movies regularly aired the film. Warner Archive got the DVD release out in 2009. It's also now available streaming. *Interrupted Melody* is "the" Eleanor Parker film from her MGM period; it's a shame she wasn't top-billed. No slight to Ford, but it would've been neat. Especially since it's a portentous turning point in Parker's filmography.

Her next 1955 film came out in December; it hadn't even begun shooting when *Interrupted Melody* released. *The Man With the Golden Arm* was Parker's first film for United Artists (they borrowed her from MGM) and a return to black and white. It was a departure from Parker's recent MGM work—*Golden Arm* is a gritty, grim tale of heroin addiction. Frank Sinatra is the lead, Parker's his wheelchair-bound wife (so two of Parker's three 1955 films had wheelchair aspects), Kim Novak's Sinatra's ex who reappears in his life. They all live in a not great part of Chicago, filled with crooks and pushers. Sinatra's just gotten clean inside the joint (actually a rehab clinic) and wants to stay clean outside. He wants to be a drummer (hence the *Golden Arm*). Parker doesn't make it easy for him, neither do the bad elements about. Otto Preminger directs the film, which is based on Nelson Algren's acclaimed (and controversial) 1949 novel.

The Man with the Golden Arm has a lot of great performances, a lot of great filmmaking—a phenomenal Elmer Bernstein score—but it's got its fair share of problems too. Walter Newman and Lewis Meltzer's script is way too contrived, especially with the characters. Parker and Novak do well but their characters' histories and ground situations are dubious concoctions. It's also way too long, with the script picking choice moments for dramatic effect. It leads to disjointed character development—even though the actors smooth it all out. Parker's awesome in her first villain role in almost a decade. Sinatra's magnificent. He acts the hell out of *Golden Arm*. Excellent supporting turns from Darren McGavin and Arnold Stang. McGavin's a pusher, Stang's a mostly incompetent crook. And Preminger's direction is excellent. He lets the film drag, but it's an

exquisite drag.

While critics embraced *Golden Arm* and its grit, the MPAA refused to give the film a Production Code seal due to the film's controversial content. United Artists went back and forth, eventually giving up and (temporarily) dropping out of the MPAA. The Production Code was seen as necessary for box office success, but it didn't end up stopping *Man with the Golden Arm* from selling tickets. Its domestic run was more than *Interrupted Melody's* worldwide gross. It also got three Oscar nominations—Best Actor, Best Art Direction, Best Music. It didn't win any. Somehow the film ended up in the public domain, which led to it being readily accessible over the years, though rarely with good quality releases. Magnetic Video first released the film on VHS in 1980, making it one of Parker's first films to be released to home video. Fox put it out a couple years later on CED. Warner Home Video would put it on VHS in 1995, a LaserDisc following four years later. At that point, with DVD's arrival, the public domain DVD companies started putting out editions. At one point, there were at least ten different releases of *The Man With the Golden Arm* on DVD, all bad quality. Until a Warner DVD release in 2008 struck from the original negative, the best release was sourced from a UK restoration (but not a restoration from the negative, rather a print). *Golden Arm* has always been accessible, though its trip through the public domain did some definite damage to its reputation.

Sixty plus years later, it's still shocking Parker didn't get a Best Supporting Actress nomination for *Golden Arm*.

After the three film year of 1955, Parker was absent from theaters for most of 1956. Her next film came in December, just over a year after *Golden Arm's* release. *The King and Four Queens* was another United Artists picture, but color and not controversial. It's a Western comedy. Parker's second-billed after Clark Gable, whose production company—Gabco—co-produced the film. Gable's the titular *King*, a Western adventurer who happens upon four young widows (and their mother-in-law). There's hidden gold around and Gable aims to get it, seducing his way through the fetching *Four Queens* if he must. Parker's the with-it widow (with secrets of her own). Jo Van Fleet is the no-nonsense mother-in-law. Raoul Walsh directs; he had directed *They Died with Their Boots On* fifteen years earlier, which would have been Parker's first film... if she hadn't ended up on the cutting room floor.

King and Four Queens is an entertaining little Western. It's short—under ninety

minutes (presumably because so much of it ended up on the cutting room floor; Walsh and Parker's collaborations are cursed)—but Gable's charming and one heck of a movie star. Parker and Van Fleet are both good. Richard Alan Simmons and Margaret Fitts write some good scenes for the actors. Walsh's direction is quite good as well. *King and Four Queens* is slight—there's obviously movie missing—but solid.

On release, *The King and Four Queens* was not particularly well-received by audiences or critics. Time dismissed it. Bosley Crowther savaged it in the New York Times, focusing on Gable's fallen star stature. And while it was far from a box office bomb, it certainly wasn't a big hit. It was also the last time Gabco Productions made a movie. Not good considering *Four Queens* was also the first Gabco production. As a producer, turns out Gable was a little petty—those massive cuts to *Four Queens*? Gable slashed Van Fleet's role (and best scenes) because critics who'd seen the rushes thought she'd get an Oscar nomination for sure. It's a shame, especially if Parker and Van Fleet had more scenes together. No story spoilers but... big time shame.

MGM/UA put *King and Four Queens* out on VHS in 1991; they pan-and-scanned the CinemaScope but Turner Classic Movies would soon be airing a letterboxed print. The film didn't make it to DVD until 2009, from MGM (via Fox). That release went out of print at some point before 2014, when MGM put out a made-on-demand release. Olive Films has put out a Blu-ray release. Sadly no one's ever included those deleted scenes.

Parker's next film would again have a movie star producer—*Lizzie* is a Bryna production (Bryna being producer Kirk Douglas's mom). MGM released the black and white film in April 1957. It's a multiple personality drama; Parker's the patient, Richard Boone is her doctor, Joan Blondell (who left Warner just a few years before Parker signed with them back in 1941) is the caring aunt, director Hugo Haas is the concerned neighbor. The film's also got Johnny Mathis in his only film appearance. He has no lines, but a couple songs.

Clocking in at eighty minutes, *Lizzie* is way too slight. Director Haas botches the picture. Mel Dinelli's script—adapted from a Shirley Jackson novel—is a disaster of its own, but Haas fails the film and Parker. Parker's not even the film's protagonist, she's its subject. And no matter how strong her performance, she can't carry it. *Lizzie*'s low budget, which wouldn't be a problem if Haas—as a director—had any successful inventive ideas. He doesn't. And his inventive

ideas–hallucination sequences–are disastrous. The supporting performances are all perfectly solid, even with razor thin parts; the acting isn't the problem, it's Dinelli, it's Haas.

Back in 1957, *Lizzie* was in a race with a Fox production, *The Three Faces of Eve*, to be the first multiple personality drama of the year. *Lizzie* won the race (*Eve* came out in the fall). Contemporary critics were far from impressed with *Lizzie*. Bosley Crowther tore into it in *The New York Times*. Audiences stayed away too. The film barely made its low budget back (and didn't make enough to turn any profit). MGM had been hoping for an Oscar nomination for Parker—which must have been particularly disappointing considering Joanne Woodward didn't just get nominated for *Eve* but won. The studio blamed Haas for not directing Parker better. They weren't wrong.

Until Warner Archive released a DVD in 2016, the only way to see *Lizzie* was on Turner Classic Movies, where it irregularly aired (most often for Parker birthday marathons). It's good for the film to have that release, sure, but it's such a disappointment. Parker, whose versatility is her biggest trait, in a multiple personality role... well. It's rather unfortunate how much Haas, Bryna, and MGM screwed it up. Worse, *Lizzie's* failure would be the start of Parker's career decline (at least in terms of production and role quality)—just two years after it found the peaks of *Melody* and *Golden Arm*.

Parker's next film of 1957, *The Seventh Sin*, came out about three months after *Lizzie*. Again at MGM, again in black and white—though this time CinemaScope black and white—*Seventh Sin* is a W. Somerset Maugham adaptation. Parker is an adulteress in post-war Hong Kong. Her lover, Jean-Pierre Aumont, is a charming French industrialist. Her husband, Bill Travers, is an obnoxious British medical doctor. When Travers realizes Parker's stepping out, he forces her to accompany him to a cholera epidemic in rural mainland China. There they meet friendly ex-pat George Sanders and Parker tries to survive without the trappings of cosmopolitan life. Ronald Neame directs; *Sin* is his first American project after ten years making pictures in the UK. At least it was his project until MGM fired him and brought in Vincente Minnelli to finish the picture. Minnelli didn't take any credit. Karl Tunberg, who co-wrote *Valley of the Kings*, handles adapting the Maugham novel here.

Unlike *Valley of the Kings*, Tunberg writes one heck of a role for Parker in *Sin*. She's got a phenomenal character arc and Parker burns through it. She gets

fantastic support from Sanders as her pal and—shockingly given it’s Sanders—moral compass. Unfortunately, Bill Travers’s performance is jaw-droppingly bad. Even with the behind the scenes drama (Neame didn’t like Parker’s performance so his firing makes all the sense), *Sin* is rather well-directed. The story has an epic scale—and while the film had a not insignificant budget of \$1.5 million, it’s not an epic budget. Parker, Sanders, Aumont, and Françoise Rosay are all good. *Sin*’s all about Parker’s magnificent performance (and cringing through Travers’s). The rushed third act—*Sin* runs a little short at ninety minutes—and the “Chinese” Miklós Rózsa score are other problems. But nothing compared to Travers’s acting.

Critics—at least Bosley Crowther in The New York Times—welcomed *Seventh Sin* indifferently; though he did like Parker’s performance. Audiences were even more indifferent. *Seventh Sin* didn’t even make back half its budget; not a successful end to Parker’s five-year MGM contract. *Sin* didn’t have a home video release until the Warner Archive DVD in 2016, which presented it widescreen. The rare Turner Classic Movies showings had been, at least until that time, pan and scan. Parker’s work in the film deserved (and deserves) a lot more recognition. Plus, it’s her only pairing with the indomitable Sanders; they’re a delight to watch together.

Following the disappointments of 1957—both pictures with so much potential for Parker, she didn’t have any releases in 1958. She was busy parenting a newborn again; son Paul Day Clemens was born in January of that year.

Her next film, *A Hole in the Head*, came out summer 1959. The film reunites her with *Golden Arm* co-star Frank Sinatra, though *Hole* is far from that picture’s grim and gritty (and black and white) Chicago. Instead, the action takes place in the bright Deluxe color pastels of Miami Beach. Sinatra’s a ne’er-do-well single parent hotel manager. Eddie Hodges is the adorable son. Edward G. Robinson is Sinatra’s successful, but boring, older brother (who Sinatra’s hitting up for money). Thelma Ritter is Robinson’s wife, Carolyn Jones is one of Sinatra’s tenants—a twenty-one year-old “free spirited” egoist he’s romantically involved with. Parker eventually shows up as a proper romantic interest for Sinatra, at least according to Robinson and Ritter. Frank Capra directs the film—his penultimate feature; he and Sinatra produced the film together (making it Parker’s third project for actor-producers in the fifties).

A Hole in the Head runs a couple hours and doesn’t start getting good until the

second hour. It doesn't start getting better than good until the final act, which is too bad. Arnold Schulman adapted his play for the screen, but that adaptation has some weird choices. The film needs a tight script, not a weird one. These actors deserve far better material. Capra's lackadaisical direction of the cast doesn't help things. But once it gets going—i.e. Sinatra getting a character to play instead of just being a heel—the film improves immediately. Though Capra's boring CinemaScope composition never improves. Parker's good in a glorified cameo (a couple of her scenes were, of course, cut). She and Sinatra get at least one good scene and Parker does a lot with the part. The actors save *A Hole in the Head*.

The film was a big hit on release—the eleventh highest grossing film of the year. Critics liked it too; *A Hole in the Head* made Time's top ten list. It also won an Oscar for its original song, *High Hopes*. MGM put the film out on VHS and LaserDisc (in the film's OAR) in 1993. They also got it out on DVD in 2001, though that release has since gone out of print. Olive Films has picked it up and released both a DVD and a Blu-ray. And the film's available streaming. During the thirty-five years between theatrical release and home video, however, the film's reputation is unclear. One assumes, because of the always popular Sinatra headlining, it at least enjoyed regular television play (before Turner Classic Movies would've taken those airings over).

As a Parker film, *A Hole in the Head* foreshadows her sixties career far more than it culminates her fifties'. She's third-billed in *A Hole in the Head* and her part's somewhat consequential (in what remains of it anyway), it's just not a big part. It's a small part, definitely smaller than the cast billed after her.

In early 1960, Parker's last theatrical picture for MGM came out. Once again in CinemaScope, but now in Metrocolor, *Home from the Hill* is epic melodrama. Robert Mitchum is a millionaire Texan, Parker's his wife, George Hamilton's their foppish teenage son, George Peppard's Mitchum's bastard. Parker has been shutting Mitchum out since she arrived in Texas with newborn Hamilton and discovered toddler Peppard. The film starts up with Mitchum surviving yet another attack from an angry cuckold—Mitchum's needs come before fidelity—but soon becomes the story of Hamilton and Peppard's friendship as Hamilton tries to butch it up as a young Texan. Vincente Minnelli directs the film (credited this time), with Harriet Frank Jr. and Irving Ravetch scripting from William Humphrey's (sometimes much different) novel.

Home from the Hill is a CinemaScope spectacular. Minnelli's direction is outstanding, both in terms of composition and of his actors. Frank and Ravetch's script is patient and deliberate—the film runs two and a half hours so they have time to be both. Of the four principals, Parker gets the least screen time but still has a full character arc or two. She and Mitchum's angry, resentful relationship turns out to be the film's backbone, with the adventures of the two Georges taking up the foreground. Great performance from Mitchum too. Parker turns what should be a histrionic part into anything but. While in full Southern accent. The two Georges' performances impress as well; beautiful photography from Milton R. Krasner. *Home from the Hill* is awesome.

And it was a hit on release. Not enough of a hit to turn a profit, but at least one of the top twenty grossing pictures of the year hit. Critical response was similarly strong—though not uniformly—and the film was selected for Cannes. Mitchum got Best Actor from the National Board of Review, George Peppard best supporting. The National Board of Review also put the film on their annual top ten list. MGM released *Home from the Hill* on VHS and LaserDisc in 1990, the LaserDisc a “deluxe letter-box edition” preserving Minnelli and Krasner's wondrous CinemaScope. Warner released a DVD in the 2007 and the film's now available streaming. Again, in the thirty years between theatrical and home video, *Home from the Hill* most have gotten television play... it just didn't build a sustained reputation. Unfortunately.

While *Home from the Hill* certainly showcased Parker's versatility and development as an actor—though she's a little young to be Hamilton's mom, the film pulls it off through the magic of Hollywood melodrama—and it's an MGM release, it doesn't prove an appropriate capstone to her fifties work. Even though it's great and she's great in it, the potential of Parker's fifties work was never realized. Both *Lizzie* and *Seventh Sin* could have given her great roles, but didn't. Parker was always a nimble actor—her toggle from the filmed stage-play of *Detective Story* to the grand cinema of *Scaramouche* set her career on the MGM trajectory and the studio got her some great roles and some excellent films resulted. Even when the films stumbled, Parker could still excel.

Of the sixteen films Parker made after leaving Warner Bros., nine of them feature singular performances. Excepting *Valentino* and *Valley of the Kings*, the remaining five performances are all excellent.

Eleanor Parker could do anything and everything, but Hollywood (and

moviegoers) tend to want their stars to do just one thing, leaving her boundless range at least underappreciated when not being completely unappreciated. But the bulk of her fifties work is available streaming. It's her decade, from *Caged to Hill*, with all these magnificent performances in between.

For her fifties output, Parker's performance makes the movies. And the filmmakers tend to understand it—*Detective Story*, *Above and Beyond*, *Naked Jungle*, *Interrupted Melody*. Studios wanted their stars to make the movie, not their stars' performances. Parker's fifties work shows the two don't have to be mutually exclusive. Brilliantly so.

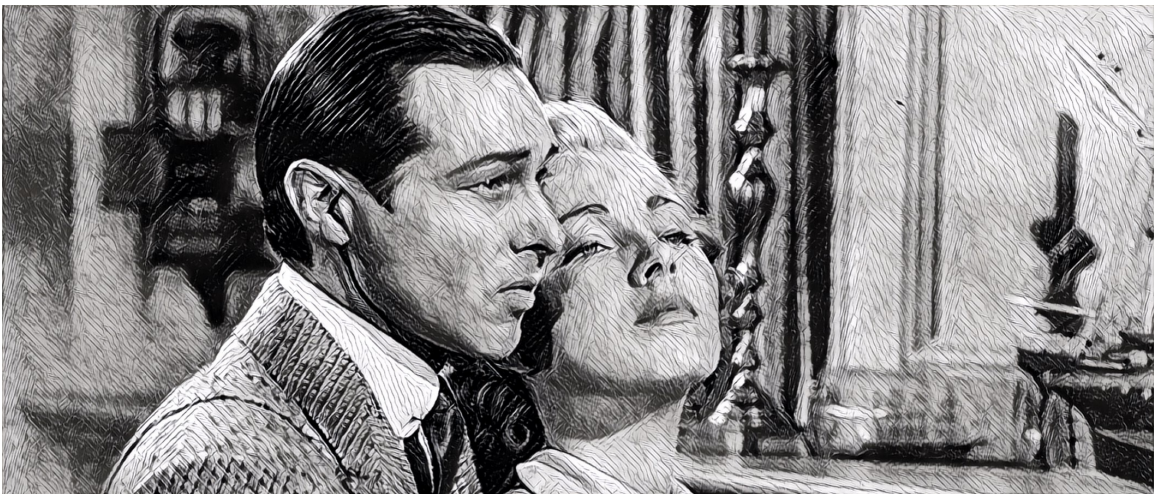
Posted. 8 January 2018.

Weblink. <https://thestopbutton.com/2018/01/08/sum-up-ep-pt2/>.

Gallery 2: 1951-60



Anthony Dexter is Rudolph Valentino and Parker is not Agnes Ayres in *Valentino*.



Valentino: The faux Great Lover and Parker.



Millionaire (MacMurray) meet Christy (Parker) in *A Millionaire for Christy*.



A Millionaire for Christy: Parker spins a tale for MacMurray and Buckley.



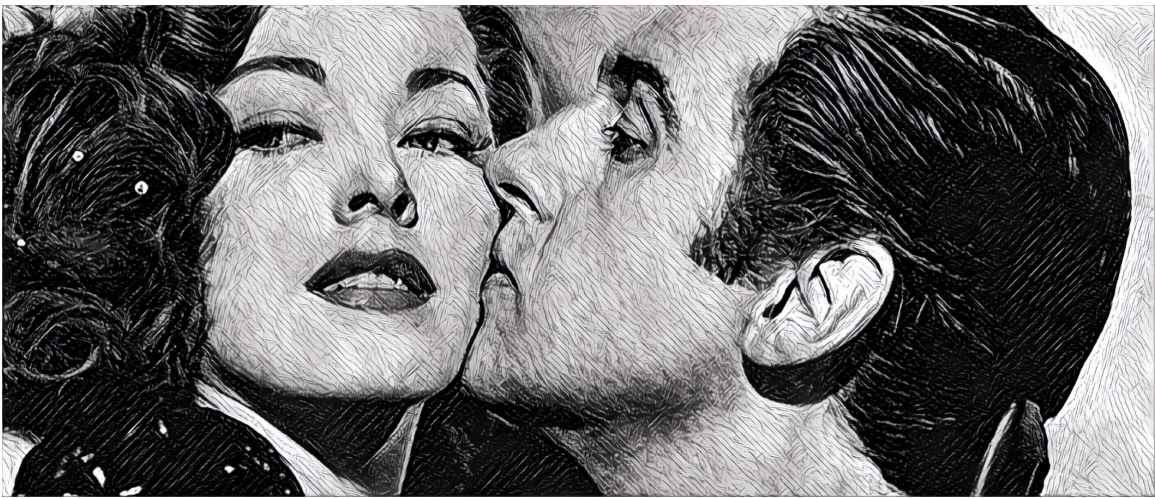
Parker in *Detective Story*.



Detective Story: Douglas and Parker.



Parker as Lenore in *Scaramouche*.



Scaramouche: Chemistry abound from Parker and Granger.



Not many smiles for Taylor and Parker in *Above And Beyond*.



Above And Beyond: Still no smiles.



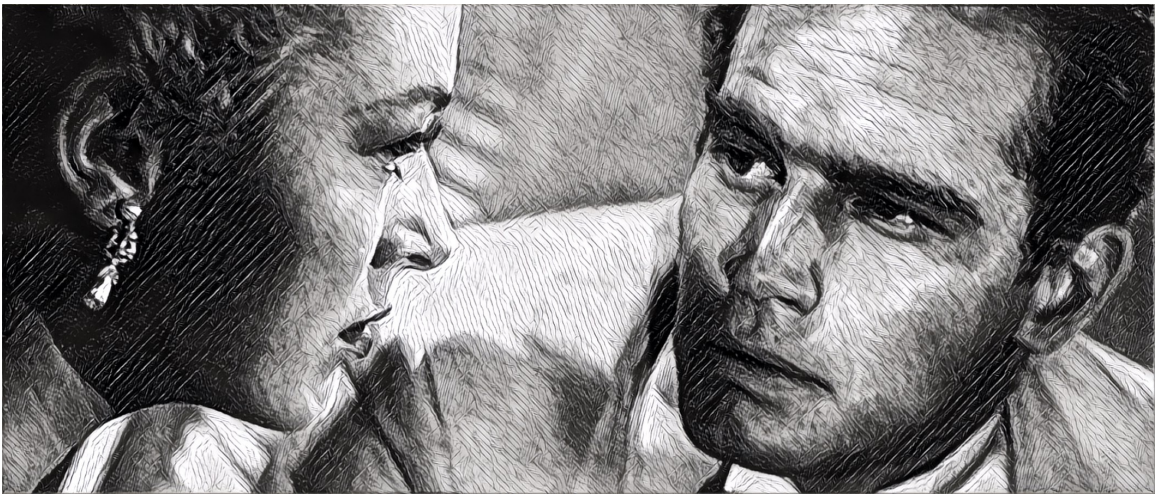
South and North collide. Parker and Holden in *Escape From Fort Bravo*.



Parker and Holden are all smiles before the *Escape From Fort Bravo*.



Eleanor Parker is Mrs. Leiningen in *The Naked Jungle*.



The Naked Jungle: Parker has Heston (justifiably) starry-eyed, whether he likes it or not.



Valley of the Kings: Tomb raiding reunites Parker and Taylor.



Kings: Parker and Taylor on location.



Many Rivers to Cross: Parker and proud pa McLaglen.



Parker displays her flirting style on Taylor in *Rivers*.



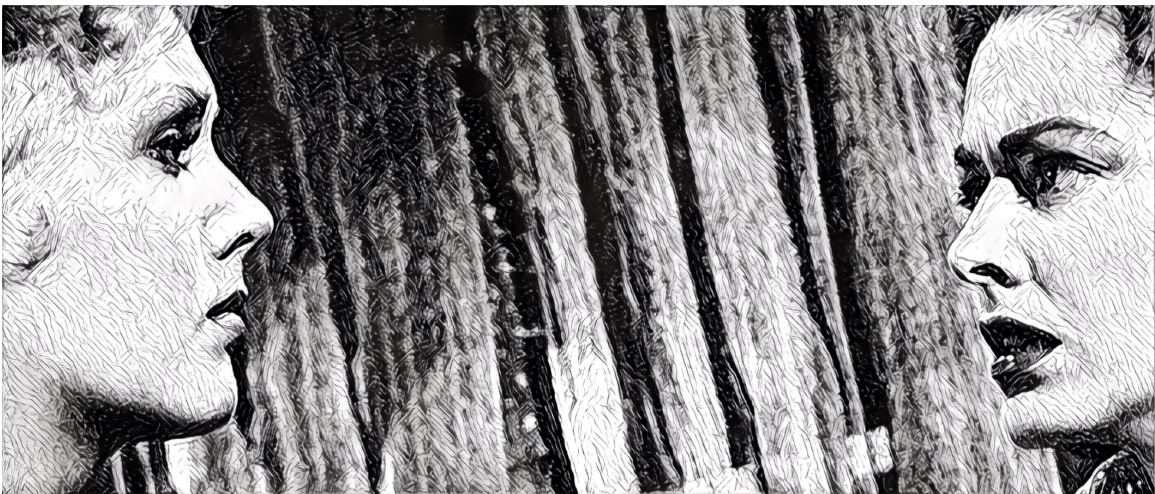
Parker and Ford in *Interrupted Melody*.



Interrupted Melody: Ford and Parker.



Parker on edge in *The Man with the Golden Arm*.



Man with the Golden Arm: Novak invades Parker's space.



King and Four Queens: Parker in Raoul Walsh Western. Finally.



King and Four Queens: Royals Gable and Parker.



Parker unleashes *Lizzie*.



Lizzie: Not very happy days for Marion Ross and Parker.



The Seventh Sin: Parker and Travers. Travers is the one having trouble convincingly pointing.



Aumont and Parker sin in *The Seventh Sin*.



A Hole in the Head: All smiles for Sinatra, Hodges, and Parker.



Hole in the Head: Sinatra tries hard on his grown-up date with Parker.



Home from the Hill: Parker frets (with cause) over Hamilton.



Parker and Mitchum are trapped in Home from the Hill.



Part 3: Baroness

Going into the nineteen sixties, Eleanor Parker's acting career seemed to have regained some of its recently lost momentum. *Home from the Hill*, released in March 1960, brought Parker into a genre she'd long avoided—the all-star soap. And—in addition to Parker being outstanding in the film, *Hill* had been a big hit. At the same time, Parker was beginning to do television (the medium had become less embarrassing for movie stars). Her only other 1960 project was a Hemingway adaptation, *The Gambler, the Nun and the Radio*, for the “Buick-Electra Playhouse” on CBS. Sadly, the series (all Hemingway adaptations) has never had any home video releases; it might not have even had repeat airings, making it one of Parker's rarest films.

The sixties would end up giving Parker her most recognized role, along with at least one more potentially great part. But those roles would come in the second half of the sixties; as the decade started, Parker would be doing less film and more television.

At least after she got done suffering through a pair of poorly produced—yet potentially successful (not to mention potentially good)—Fox melodramas.

Parker's first Fox melodrama was 1961's *Return to Peyton Place*, which reunited her with a forties Warner alum, producer Jerry Wald. He'd produced three of her films at Warner Bros., including her best picture there—1950's *Caged*. It'd been Parker's first Oscar nomination. Wald and Fox had been planning the sequel film to *Peyton Place* since novelist Grace Metalious released the ill-advised and poorly received sequel novel in 1959. Fox, smarting from *Cleopatra*'s budget overruns, decided to go cheap and not bring back the original cast (though some of the original crew came back, including composer Franz Waxman). Parker took over Lana Turner's part. *Return to Peyton Place* centers around Carol Lynley (replacing Diane Varsi) and her *Peyton Place*-esque expose novel and its fallout back home. Lynley's also having an affair with her married New York City book editor Jeff Chandler. José Ferrer directs. Mary Astor and Tuesday Weld (replacing Hope Lange) costar.

Return to Peyton Place is one of those soapy, CinemaScope melodramas Parker smartly avoided in the 1950s. Turner had been the lead in the original, but third-billed Parker gets nothing to do in the sequel (paired with an ineffective Robert Sterling—in for Lee Phillips). Lynley and Chandler are awful. Astor's got her moments. Weld's somewhat likable. Besides the bad acting—and there's a lot

more—Ronald Alexander’s script is terrible (though Metalious’s source sequel apparently isn’t any better). It’s an unfortunate, but predictable failure.

Shockingly, contemporary critical reception to *Return to Peyton Place* was mild. Astor’s performance got some appreciation. The film did well at the box office too (though only thirty-six percent of what the original made). It also did not get any Oscar nominations (versus the original’s nine). Fox released the film on VHS—pan and scanning the CinemaScope—in the early nineties and it no doubt played on Fox Movie Channel over the years. Stretching the credulity of the label, Fox put out a DVD in 2005 as part of their “Studio Classics” series. The film is now available streaming as well.

Parker’s next failed Fox melodrama arrived a year later—*Madison Avenue* (filmed in 1960, released overseas before *Return to Peyton Place*) came out in January 1962. Costarring Dana Andrews, Jeanne Crain, and Eddie Albert, *Madison Avenue* is all about advertising Young Turk Andrews (fifty-one playing thirty or so) disrupting the dairy industry and, just maybe, the White House. Parker’s the rival ad woman who Andrews seduces (personally and professionally). Crain’s the earnest reporter Andrews manipulates. Albert is the seeming stooge who Andrews props up. H. Bruce Humberstone directs.

Madison Avenue’s actors try—though Andrews and Parker are able to hide their contempt for the film better than Crain—and, even though the film misfires, it does so gracefully. To an extent. Humberstone’s direction is wanting, but Norman Corwin’s screenplay has some good points. The film’s CinemaScope, runs ninety minutes, with a present action of three years, yet is way too little. It doesn’t help the cast is all too old, in one way or another, for their parts. Parker has a bad arc, but does get some decent material at the start.

On release, The New York Times’s Howard Thompson enjoyed deriding the film utilizing its milk content as fodder (i.e. it’s a milksop). He does take the time to say Parker has “never looked more ravishing” (he similarly complemented her appearance and ignored her performance in his *Escape from Fort Bravo* review nine years before). The film never got a VHS release, though it did play—occasionally letterboxed—on the Fox Movie Channel. Fox released *Madison Avenue* on its Cinema Archives DVD label with a terrible pan and scan transfer in 2012. The film is third of the four Andrews and Crain made together; it’s unfortunate Parker never got to costar with either in a better picture.

Following *Madison Avenue*’s domestic release in January 1962, it would be

over two years before Parker appeared in another film. She stayed busy during that time on television. Parker made five television appearances between 1962 and 1964. The first, an episode of CBS's "Checkmate," aired a few weeks after *Madison Avenue* came out. Then it'd be a year before her next appearance—an Emmy-nominated turn on "The Eleventh Hour" in February 1963. That October, she appeared on "The Chrysler Theatre" in *Seven Miles of Bad Road*, costarring Jeffrey Hunter and Neville Brand. "Eleventh Hour" and "Chrysler" both aired on NBC. In January 1964, Parker guest-starred on ABC's "Breaking Point." Then in March, she did an episode of the "Kraft Suspense Theatre," opposite Roger Smith. "Checkmate" and "Eleventh Hour" have been released on DVD, but none of the others have official releases.

In April 1964, producer Ron Gorton—through his own Gorton Associates—released *Panic Button*, starring Parker, Maurice Chevalier, Jayne Mansfield, Mike Connors, and Akim Tamiroff. The film had been done since 1962—domestic distributor Warner Bros. decided against releasing it—when it premiered in Italy (where it was filmed). Connors plays a Hollywood producer who needs to make a bomb to get his dad's company out of tax trouble. Chevalier is a washed-up actor, Parker's his ex-wife and manager, Mansfield is the pretty face, Tamiroff is the incompetent movie-in-the-movie director. George Sherman is the real director.

Panic Button is far from a success, but nowhere near an abject failure. Parker is great—even though the script does her character no favors (mostly in the character arcs for her costars, Chevalier and Connors). The film wastes Tamiroff, which shouldn't be possible. The big comedy sequences don't work, the little moments don't work. Somehow the cast's professionalism keeps it somewhat afloat (even if Chevalier, in one of his final roles, isn't good). And Venice is pretty.

The film was not a success on domestic release and soon faded into obscurity, "saved" only by cheap VHS releases—their covers emphasizing Mansfield's cleavage—until Warner Archive (surprisingly) put out a nice widescreen DVD a few years ago. Just like *Madison Avenue*, the film foreshadows Parker's sexy older woman parts, which she'd start getting stateside in a few years.

But first would be Parker's most successful film, 1965's *The Sound of Music*.

Based on a true story turned smash hit Broadway musical and filmed on location in the Austrian Alps, *Sound of Music* stars Julie Andrews as a young

Austrian postulant (pre-nun) in 1938. She's sent to be a governess for widower Christopher Plummer, who has seven children and a fiancée, Parker. Andrews (and her singing) helps the children mourn their mother's passing; she also catches Plummer's eye, making Parker rather displeased. But only for the first half of the three hour film. After intermission, Parker's gone, the Nazis are on the way, and the family's in trouble, happy singing or not.

Sound of Music is usually outstanding thanks to lead Andrews. Great songs, great music. Andrews's charges are all adorable. Plummer's good as the stern father with the heart of gold. Parker spends most of her time plotting with Richard Haydn; that plotting leads to some decent scenes with her and stars Andrews and Plummer. The second half of *Sound of Music* is lacking compared to the first, but it's still an outstanding musical.

Contemporary critical response was mixed—New York critics greatly disliked it, West coast critics and the trades loved it. So did audiences. *The Sound of Music*, released in March 1965, had a theatrical run of four and a half years; it became the highest grossing film of all time a year and a half into its release. It won five Academy Awards, including Best Picture and Best Director. After a single 1976 airing on ABC, in 1979, NBC started broadcasting *Sound of Music* annually. They usually cut the film down to 140 minutes. NBC showed it for twenty years, including a special letterboxed airing in 1995.

The film was one of the first three VHS releases in 1979. It was out on LaserDisc and CED soon after; the first letterboxed release was the 1989 LaserDisc rerelease. The first DVD arrived in 2000, followed five years later by another edition, then Blu-ray in 2010. And now it's available streaming as well, of course.

The Sound of Music has been a (pop) cultural phenomenon since its release over fifty years ago. And Parker, no matter what else she did before (or after), is forever "The Baroness" to generations of audiences. But instead of returning Parker to A-pictures, the latter half of the sixties relegated her to camp. The bad camp.

Parker's next film opened a year later in March 1966. *The Oscar*, directed by Russell Rouse, based on Richard Sale's novel. It's another of the "all star" melodramas Parker never did in the fifties. Stephen Boyd is the lead, a snotty actor nominated for Best Actor—*The Oscar's* refers to the Academy Award. The film recounts Boyd's backstabbing his way to the top, mostly in flashback.

Parker plays his first agent and his jealous, older lover—she's fourth billed of nine. The film also stars Elke Sommer, Joseph Cotten, Milton Berle, Jill St. John, and Tony Bennett. Sci-fi writer Harlan Ellison cowrote the script.

The Oscar is indescribably godawful. Terrible direction, terrible writing, terrible lead acting from Boyd and Bennett. Tony Bennett never acted again. Thankfully. Some of the cast tries—St. John, Berle, and Parker all to varying degrees—but there's nothing they can do. *The Oscar's* a smorgasboard of terrible and really has to be seen to be understood. There are some great Edith Head gowns though. They even got nominated for an Oscar. A real one.

While Embassy Pictures released the film domestically, Paramount put out *The Oscar* everywhere else. One has to wonder if they dumped it for domestic release. Critics rightfully savaged *The Oscar* on release—with Parker getting the only good notices. Audiences stayed away. The film's gone on to earn notoriety as a terrible film, but not one easy for people to see. It's only had a single home video release—VHS in the eighties. TCM has aired the film as well, though still in an old pan and scan transfer. These airings are sparing.

No one wants to see *The Oscar*. Even if they think they do.

Parker's other 1966 release, *An American Dream*, came out in October. Adapted from a Norman Mailer novel, the film stars Stuart Whitman as a war hero turned television blowhard who runs afoul of the mob after murdering his estranged wife (Parker). Along the way he reunites with ex-girlfriend Janet Leigh. Robert Gist directed the Warner Bros. release (Parker's first time back since 1950) with Mann Rubin handling the screenplay.

An American Dream ranges from terrible to unbearable. Gist's direction and the script are both bad, as is much of the acting—Whitman especially. Leigh's not good either, but at least it's the writing doing her in. Whitman's just acting poorly. Parker's got some amazing hysterics and maybe if she'd lasted the entire run time *American Dream* would at least be tolerable. She doesn't though. And it goes from bad to worse. The first five minutes, however, are deceptively well-executed.

The film was such a disaster on release, Warner pulled it and put it back out with a new title, *See You in Hell, Darling*, desperate for any success. The new title didn't help. Contemporary critics compared it, in its badness, to *The Oscar*. So both Parker's 1966 films were fiascos. But more *An American Dream*, which had a distinct advertising campaign—initially—based around Parker's

character (sometimes her hysterics, sometimes her sex appeal). If it'd been a good movie, if it'd been a good script, *American Dream* would've given Parker an easy Best Supporting Actress nomination. Except it was terrible.

An American Dream never had a VHS release. It aired on TCM occasionally. Warner Archive put out a DVD in 2010 and the film's now available streaming too. In case anyone wants to suffer.

Parker's next film also had a script from Mann Rubin—January 1967's *Warning Shot*, directed by Buzz Kulik. The film, a Paramount release, was originally supposed to be a TV movie but it turned out too violent. David Janssen is a cop who kills an armed suspect only for the suspect's gun to disappear. He works his way through an all star cast of bit players—including Ed Begley, Keenan Wynn, George Sanders, Stefanie Powers, and Lillian Gish—while trying to find out the truth. Parker plays the suspect's flirtatious widow.

Warning Shot is a perfectly serviceable mystery. Kulik and Rubin make it engaging. Janssen's a great lead. Many of the cameos are good, including Parker and Sanders. They both get a scene. The film's a little uneven—Janssen's investigation has to wait for his police inquiry to resolve, which Kulik directs quite differently from the rest of the film—and the finale is a disappointment, but *Warning Shot* is always involving.

The film didn't make much impression on release. Critics concentrated on its television pedigree. *Warning Shot* doesn't seem to have ever gotten a VHS release, though Paramount put it out a widescreen DVD in 2005. That release has since gone out of print.

Warning Shot would be Parker's last vivacious “older” lady part in features (she was only forty-four). None of the three or four (*Panic Button* sort of counts) roles led to anything, as *American Dream*'s part was theoretically the most promising and the film is such an exceptional stinker.

In her next film, *The Tiger and the Pussycat*, Parker again plays the “older” woman but she's no longer vivacious. At least not according to the film. *Tiger*'s another Italian production; Parker is married to Vittorio Gassman, who's cheating on her with ingenue Ann-Margaret. The film is set in Rome, directed by Dino Risi. It had an April 1967 release in Italy, with Embassy putting it out domestically that September.

Tiger and the Pussycat is fairly awful, with Risi's two directorial interests

misogyny and male gaze. Ann-Marget's bad. Gassman—who has to carry the film himself—might be good if the script weren't so bad. And if Risi weren't so lousy. Parker's got a dreadful part. Alessandro D'Eva's photography is good. Rome's pretty? *Tiger and the Pussycat* is indistinctly lousy.

In Italy, The film won two David di Donatello awards—best producer and best actor—but its domestic release seems to have been lackluster. Risi, Gassman, and Ann-Marget would go on to make another film together (1968's *Mr. Kinky*). *Tiger and the Pussycat* had quite a few VHS releases, from a variety of independent video labels, starting in the early nineties. It also had a (now out of print) DVD release in 2001.

The next year, 1968, Parker didn't have any theatrical releases in the United States. She'd only done one television guest appearance in 1965 and none the two years following. The 1965 appearance was on NBC's "Convoy," which isn't available on home video. Parker returned to NBC in early 1968 for the last two episodes of "The Man from U.N.C.L.E." She plays a vivacious older U.N.C.L.E. widow and spends the majority of the episodes in flagrante with villain Mark Richman. In September 1968, MGM released the episodes combined as one of the "Man from U.N.C.L.E." theatrical movies overseas, entitled *How to Steal the World*. It's been available on video and now DVD (the movie version from Warner Archive, the TV show episodes from Warner).

Parker only had one more theatrical release in the sixties—1969's *Eye of the Cat*. It was Parker's first straight horror film—she's wealthy aunt to lead Michael Sarrazin, who decides he's going to murder her. Gayle Hunnicutt is the girl who convinces Sarrazin, though given how long Parker's been abusing Sarrazin and brother Tim Henry, it doesn't take much. Parker's relationship with Sarrazin is physical (in the gross way). The film's an original script from Joseph Stefano (*Psycho*), with David Lowell Rich directing.

Eye of the Cat is uneven and unsuccessful. Stefano's script needs some work, Rich's direction is entirely lacking, but Sarrazin and Parker do keep the movie going. Hunnicutt and Henry don't help things. Rich even manages to bungle the San Francisco location shooting. Stefano just wants to do a thriller, Rich can't direct thrills. Still, it could be a lot worse. Parker and Sarrazin taking it seriously makes the difference.

The film made it onto television by the early seventies (with a less violent, simultaneously shot ending) before fading into obscurity. Like everything else

Sarrazin ever did. *Cat* didn't have a home video release on VHS, LaserDisc, or DVD. Out of nowhere, Shout! Factory put it out on Blu-ray in 2018, forty-nine years after its theatrical premiere.

While *Eye of the Cat* was Parker's only theatrical release of the year (though *Sound of Music* would still be in theaters until November), 1969 is when she decided to give series television a go. Starting in September, Parker was top-billed on NBC's "Bracken's World," airing Friday nights at nine. She'd only stick around for sixteen episodes, quitting by the end of January 1970. The show, set at a fictional movie studio, had Parker as the executive secretary to the unseen Bracken. Before Parker parted ways with NBC on "Bracken," she would also top-line their *Hans Brinker* television movie.

Airing in December 1969, *Hans Brinker* is a musical adaptation, partially filmed on location in the Netherlands. Parker plays Hans's mother and even has two songs, which she did not sing (uncredited Sandy Stewart did). Robin Askwith plays Hans. Roberta Tovey is his sister. The majority of the cast is the kids, with the billed stars doing extended cameos. Richard Basehart, for example. He's second-billed but an extended cameo. Robert Scheerer directs, Bill Manhoff did the teleplay adaptation.

Hans Brinker is a fairly intolerable hundred minutes. The songs (by Moose Charlap) are terrible. Sheerer's direction is bad. Askwith's performance is equal parts obnoxious and terrible. Tovey's a little better. Parker's part is thin (at best). *Hans* has nothing going for it. It's not clear if Manhoff's teleplay is responsible for the plodding, bad story or if it's just the source material (by Mary Mapes Dodge, an American author fancifully imagining *Hans*'s Netherlands setting).

The contemporary reaction to *Hans Brinker* appears lost to time. Though the Detroit Free Press's Lawrence Laurent opined—in a piece about the pitfalls of musical adaptations (he hadn't seen *Hans* yet)—NBC expected to have a hit on their hands. Based on the movie's obscurity, it seems unlikely they did. Warner Home Video put out a VHS in the mid-eighties and there was at least one sell-through VHS release in the nineties (not from Warner). Kultur Video put out a DVD in 2003, which is since out of print. It was on the back of that release where Stewart finally got credited for her singing.

With the exception of *The Sound of Music*, which didn't even give Parker a good part, there aren't many bright spots in Parker's sixties filmography. Her nine theatrical releases are easily some of her worst. Even when the parts were a

little better (or implied they could be better), the directors and screenwriters weren't up to the task. Parker's flirtation with television—starting in the early sixties and giving her occasional good parts—had slowed down after *Sound of Music*.

But even as audiences flocked to that film, seeing *The Baroness* for four and a half years, there apparently just weren't any good parts for Parker anymore. She fell victim to Hollywood's hate relationship with its older female stars. She was offered four parts in the sixties—martyr, sexy wife, cuckquean, pervy aunt. And baroness. “*Bracken's World*” could have offered some better material—Parker still got a Golden Globe nomination for Best Actress – Drama even if she skipped out on the series—but it's no surprise she went into the seventies concentrating on theater.

Posted. 17 March 2018.

Weblink. <https://thestopbutton.com/2018/03/17/sum-up-ep-pt3/>.

Gallery 3: 1961-69



Not-Radio Charles Bickford, *Gambler* Richard Conte, and *Nun* Parker.



An unhappy return; Parker in *Return to Peyton Place*.



Stars deserving of a better film: Astor, Weld, and Parker in *Peyton Place*.



Parker in Madison Avenue.



Madison Avenue: Andrews, Parker, and Albert are all smiles but the milk industry's cutthroat.



Hollywood, Italian Style. Parker and Connors in *Panic Button*.



Panic Button: Mansfield, Chevalier, Parker, and Connors.



Music: Plummer lets Parker convince him to consider shipping the children off to boarding school.



A Sound of Music summary: Andrews on one side, Parker on the other, Plummer in the middle. Children in the background.



Parker can't resist Boyd's (ludicrously unbelievable) Oscar-worthiness in *The Oscar*.



Berle and Parker trying to survive *The Oscar*.



Parker and pearls: one of *An American Dream's* initial ad campaigns.



Boozy Parker. *An American Dream's* other ad campaign.



Parker in a *Warning Shot* publicity still.



Warning Shot: Janssen questions Parker.



Parker, exasperated in *Tiger*.



Tiger And The Pussycat: Family dysfunction, Italian style - first time grandparents Parker and Gassman.



Parker's not messing around with "U.N.C.L.E".



Eye Of The Cat: Outdoor unhappiness with Sarrazin and Parker.



Indoor unhappiness. Sarrazin and Parker in *Cat*.



Parker in "Bracken's World".



II Trovatore it ain't. Parker "sings" to Tovey in *Hans Brinker*.



Hans Brinker: Basehart breaks the bad news to Askwith, Tovey, and Parker—the movie's not over yet.



Part 4: Guest Star

When she starred in *Eye of the Cat*, Eleanor Parker had been in more than forty theatrical films. She was forty-seven years old. She had just been in the biggest movie of all time—1965’s *The Sound of Music*. When *Eye of the Cat* came out in June 1969, *Sound of Music* was still playing in theaters in its original, four and a half year theatrical run. *Eye of the Cat* would be Parker’s last theatrical release for ten years. With the exception, of course, of *The Sound of Music*, which got a rerelease in 1973.

After *Cat*, Parker had committed to her first regular role on a television series, “Bracken’s World.” She’d quit halfway through the first season, but still got a Golden Globe nomination for Best TV Drama Actress.

But she’d never play another lead. She was forty-seven. Hollywood had no use for a forty-seven year-old female lead; not even the TV side. Parker returned to the theater, where there were better parts, and she started regularly appearing in TV movies. At least at the beginning of the seventies.

Parker had two television movie appearances in 1971; first was ABC’s *Maybe I’ll Come Home in the Spring*, which stars Sally Field as a teenage runaway who returns home. Parker plays Mom, Jackie Cooper is Dad, Lane Bradbury is Field’s younger sister. Meanwhile, Field’s old man (David Carradine) is traveling cross-country to rescue her from her parents’ square, suburban—functionally alcoholic and dysfunctional—household. Turns out Bradbury is showing all the pre-runaway signs, something Field can’t convince her parents. Joseph Sargent directs.

Although a little short—seventy-four minutes—and it takes Sargent a while to get comfortable with the television framing on his establishing shots, *Maybe I’ll Come Home in the Spring* is a spectacularly acted “family in crisis” drama. Sargent and writer Bruce Feldman use flashback to reveal Field’s story, juxtaposed against Bradbury in the present. Great parts for Cooper and Parker. They start the film, with Field coming into it gradually; Field’s excellent, assuming the protagonist role through her performance alone; she gets little help from Feldman’s teleplay.

Maybe I’ll Come Home in the Spring first aired in February and ABC reran it before the end of the year. It aired every few years for at least a decade. The film was a budget VHS mainstay—the first EP edition arrived in 1991—and it’s been on

DVD, from one label or another, since 2001. *Spring* is now available streaming as well.

A few weeks after *Maybe* aired, Parker was on television screens again, appearing in the first “two part TV movie” (they weren’t called miniseries yet). *Vanished* aired on NBC in March, with Richard Widmark top-lining as the President of the United States. It was his first TV venture. Scientist and presidential pal Arthur Hill disappears. Then other scientists worldwide start disappearing. Is it a Soviet plot? Parker plays Hill’s wife, who gets investigated by FBI agent Robert Hooks and his roommate, White House press secretary James Farentino. *Vanished* has twelve major starring credits; in addition to Parker, Widmark, Hooks, and Farentino, there are Tom Bosley, Murray Hamilton, E.G. Marshall, Larry Hagman, Skye Aubrey, Robert Young, and William Shatner. Then there are all the supporting players. Huge cast. Buzz Kulik—reuniting with Parker from 1967’s TV movie turned theatrical release, *Warning Shot*—directs from a teleplay by Dean Riesner.

Vanished is a tedious three hours and ten minutes. The cast enters and exits as needed—Hooks goes from playing a major part to a nothing one, Parker ends up disappearing as completely as Hill, Widmark is scenery for the first half and then takes over the last quarter. The movie’s got a lot of moving parts and Kulik keeps them functioning. It just never gels into anything. The reveals are never good enough to excuse the cheap, sensational teases.

Despite a snide, dismissive review from John J. O’Connor in *The New York Times*, *Vanished* went on to get Emmy nominations for Widmark and Young. The movie, in its two parts, got rerun occasionally over the years, sometimes in the middle of the night, more recently on cable television. It’s never had any home video releases. There’s seemingly no notoriety in being the first two-night television movie.

It would be a year and a half before Parker appeared in anything again. In early November 1972, she starred in an episode of NBC’s horror anthology “Circle of Fear,” *Half a Death*. She plays mom to Pamela Franklin, who plays twins. One twin is haunting the other. The series is out on DVD from Warner Archive; it’s Parker’s only TV series appearance until 1978. She’d stick with TV movies until then (with a sort of exception).

TV movies such as *Home for the Holidays*, which aired on ABC just a few weeks after her episode of “Circle of Fear.”

Home for the Holidays has a spectacular cast; in addition to Parker, there's Jessica Walter, Sally Field (playing Parker's younger sister this time), Julie Harris, and Walter Brennan. Brennan is the cranky, rich, sickly dad. Walter, Field, Parker, and Jill Howarth plays his daughters. Harris is his new wife (and the prime suspect in the sisters' mother's death). There's a lot of unpleasant backstory to the sisters, who reunite on Christmas Eve at Brennan's request. And then they have to deal with a mad killer. John Llewellyn Moxey directs from an original Joseph Stefano script. Stefano wrote Parker's last horror movie (and, at this point, last theatrical film), *Eye of the Cat*.

The movie's fairly successful. Most of the acting is excellent, particularly Harris, Walter, and Parker. Field holds her own. Haworth doesn't. Brennan is barely in it. Moxey relies way too much on zooming his shots, but otherwise he directs the movie pretty well. There's a great chase sequence. Stefano's script is thin; the actors gets the movie to the finish line. The end—featuring the big reveal—is problematic. Zooming does play a part.

Holidays didn't make any critical waves—Howard Thompson dismissed it in the New York Times, definitely not a fan of the “ABC Movie of the Week” thrillers. It had its first VHS release in the late eighties, then another, budget (i.e. EP) release in the early nineties. It's also been released on DVD—by Echo Bridge Home Entertainment—but only in their horror movie compilation sets, which they don't market or index well. The only way to spot a *Home for the Holidays* inclusion is to read the back cover; a time consuming process seeing as how Echo Bridge has dozens of horror compilations. It also appears to be out of print.

Parker's next TV movie was again for ABC. *The Great American Beauty Contest* aired in March 1973, starring Parker as a former winner, now hostess. Robert Cummings plays her sidekick. Louis Jordan is one of the judges (a scummy, blackmailing one). JoAnna Cameron, Farrah Fawcett, Tracy Reed, Kathrine Baumann, and Susan Damante play the main contestants. At least the ones Stanford Whitmore's teleplay showcases. It's a behind-the-scenes story of the contest. Robert Day directs. *Contest* is an Aaron Spelling and Leonard Goldberg production; they also produced *Home for the Holidays*.

While Parker's all right—and even manages to get a decent character arc in Whitmore's jerkily paced script—*Great American Beauty Contest* is pretty bad. Day's direction is bad, Whitmore's writing is bad. Cummings provides okay support for Parker and Jordan's a great villain. None of the actors playing the

contestants give notable performances. Reed and Baumann are better than the rest. Damante is worst. Fawcett's little better than Damante. Still, somehow—probably thanks to Jordan's odiousness—*Contest* stays engaging. Or maybe it's just agitation from dreading a Fawcett or Damante win.

The Great American Beauty Contest got a not terrible write-up from Howard Thompson at The New York Times when it aired. He liked Whitmore's writing. And Fawcett's performance. The movie has rerun occasionally over the years but, Fawcett or not, it's never had a VHS release or a DVD one.

Parker didn't have any 1974 acting credits, at least not film or television, and when she returned in 1975, she was once again going to try series television. She starred in a *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* sitcom pilot, taking over the Katharine Hepburn role from the film. Richard Dysart plays the Spencer Tracy part, Bill Overton the Sidney Poitier, and Leslie Charleson the Katharine Houghton part. Madge Sinclair and Madge Sinclair played Overton's parents. The sitcom would have dealt with the turmoil related to Overton and Charleson's interracial marriage, if ABC had picked it up. They did not, however; the pilot only aired once in July 1975. ABC apparently had cold feet over the interracial kissing, which should've been an obvious result of an interracial marriage. The pilot's never had a home video release of any kind.

Following *Guess Who*, Parker took 1976 off from filmed work. In 1977, she resumed guest starring on regular television series. That year she appeared on "Hawaii Five-O" and the first episode of "Fantasy Island." Parker would do two more appearances on "Fantasy Island," one in 1979, another in 1983. She also did "Love Boat" in 1979, then an episode of "Vega\$" in 1980.

Amid those guest spots, Parker did a couple more TV movies, a pilot, a miniseries, and her final theatrical appearance.

The Bastard is the miniseries, a big budget adaptation of John Jakes's novel; it aired on NBC in May 1978. Parker is one of the twenty-one credited stars. Andrew Stevens plays the lead, a French bastard who comes to the Colonies and ends up an instrumental figure in the Revolutionary War. Lee H. Katzin directs. William Shatner plays Paul Revere. Parker plays Stevens's father's widow, a duchess. She doesn't want to let him have his inheritance. Patricia Neal plays his mother. Neal and Parker, reunited thirty-eight years after *Three Secrets*, are in scenes together (but only share the screen in long shot). Keenan Wynn, who appeared with Parker in *A Hole in the Head* but never alongside her, is another

of *The Bastard's* twenty-one stars. They again don't share any scenes. And Tom Bosley. He was in *Vanished*. He's Ben Franklin.

Could *The Bastard* be worse? Sure. It's a relentlessly simple period piece, with Southern California not just standing in for the American East Coast, but Britain and France as well. Parker's cameo is good. Neal's part isn't. Stevens is annoying—though he gets better for a while during the second half. Katzin's direction is bad. Guerdon Trueblood's script is bad. The bit parts for seventies television actors amuses a little (I mean, *Bob Newhart's* Peter Bonerz in a costume drama is something else). But it's bad.

While *The Bastard* didn't get glowing reviews, it was well-regarded enough to get a Golden Globe nomination for Best TV Movie and a couple art direction Emmy nominations. And sufficient viewers to warrant watched NBC going ahead and finishing the adaptations of Jakes's the series—*The Kent Chronicles*—with two two-night sequels. Parker didn't return for either of them. *The Bastard* had a VHS release in the nineties from Universal, along with its two sequels. Acorn Media has put all three out in a *Kent Chronicles* DVD set.

In August 1979, Parker would make her final theatrical appearance in *Sunburn*, a Farrah Fawcett vehicle. The film stars Charles Grodin as an insurance investigator who goes down to Acapulco to investigate a claim. Fawcett's the model he hires to be his pretend girlfriend (so no one knows he's an insurance investigator). Art Carney plays Grodin's sidekick. There's an assortment of suspects, including Joan Collins (who'd also been in *Warning Shot*, the aforementioned 1967 Buzz Kulik film Parker costarred in), John Hillerman, William Daniels, even Keenan Wynn. No, Parker still doesn't get a scene with Wynn (after *Hole in the Head* and *Bastard*). Parker doesn't even get a speaking close-up. She's usually in some kind of long shot. Richard C. Sarafian directs for Paramount.

Sunburn has a lot of problems, like Sarafian's direction. He can't do any of the things *Sunburn* wants to do like being a noir spoof. Most of the cameos are too thin. Fawcett's a reasonably affable star in her (second) star vehicle. Grodin goes all out with a caricature of himself. Joan Collins is awesome. If it were made better—it's not just Sarafian, the film's a technical turkey—and written a little better, there might be something to *Sunburn*. But it could also be a whole lot worse.

The film got a tepid endorsement from Janet Maslin in *The New York Times*.

Maslin found it was an improvement over Fawcett's previous post-"Charlie's Angels" vehicle, but didn't care for Collins in particular. Audiences didn't care for the film in general and it quickly bombed. Parker apparently only did the cameo because *Sunburn* was filming near her Palm Springs home. It had a VHS release in 1980 from Paramount and has been absent home video since then, save a Japanese DVD release.

Parker was back to TV a few months later. Her next TV movie, *She's Dressed to Kill*, aired on NBC in December. Parker plays a drunken fashion designer declining in affluence who mentally abuses her models. John Rubinstein is the lead, a photographer who gets caught up with a murder mystery after Parker invites a bunch of people out to her private mountain to show her new line. Jessica Walter (who appeared in *Home for the Holidays* with Parker) plays Rubinstein's boss. Connie Sellecca is one of the models, Gretchen Corbett is the "plain girl" Rubinstein romances. Gus Trikonis directs from a George Lefferts teleplay.

She's Dressed to Kill is a diverting ninety minute thriller, plus commercials. Parker's great, chowing down on all available scenery, and Walter's excellent. Shame Walter's barely in the movie. Rubinstein's an okay lead, Corbett's good, Sellecca's bad. The writing never helps the actors. And the movie ditches characters too often (i.e. Walter). Better direction from Trikonis wouldn't hurt either. But it's far from bad.

For repeat airings, the movie sometimes got retitled, *Someone's Killing the World's Greatest Models*, but it was always *She's Dressed to Kill* for home video. USA Home Video first put it out on VHS in the eighties and it had at least two releases; one giving Parker top-billing. It came out on DVD in 2008—a "grey" market release.

It was almost a year before Parker's next appearance. She tried another pilot, *Once Upon a Spy*, a two-hour movie; ABC aired it in September 1980. A resulting series would have featured the adventures of computer scientist turned spy Ted Danson, his beautiful handler, Mary Louise Weller, and their boss, an M-type character only called "The Lady." Parker plays "The Lady." Christopher Lee plays the villain, who kidnaps a scientist with a shrinking ray. Ivan Nagy directs from a Jimmy Sangster script.

If it weren't for Nagy, Sangster, and Danson, *Spy* would be a lot better. Weller's likable, Lee's good, there's a genial tone—and a nice Bond knock-off

score from John Cacavas. Parker doesn't get anything to do. She sits in a room by herself and frequently says "bloody," possibly because Welsh Sangster didn't know how Americans talk. Nagy's direction is bad. Danson's got the physicality for the role, but his performance is the pits. Still, it's not terrible for a TV movie.

Once Upon a Spy's ratings didn't get it a series order from ABC. The movie got rerun over the years, but never had a home video release in the United States. Columbia put it out on VHS in the UK. In 2013, the Sony Pictures Choice Collection DVD label put it out on DVD.

Parker's next TV movie—her last of the eighties—was *Madame X*. The seventh version of *Madame X*. NBC aired it in March 1981. Tuesday Weld plays the lead, a shamed woman exiled to Europe by her sinister mother-in-law (Parker). Granville Van Dusen plays the mama's boy husband. Weld kicks around Europe (filmed on set in Hollywood Europe), meeting various men—including Jerry Stiller and Jeremy Brett—all while getting progressively drunker. She ends up on trial, with her defense attorney (Martina Deignan) the daughter Weld had to abandon. Très dramatique. Robert Ellis Miller directs, Edward Anhalt adapts from the original Alexandre Bisson play as well as the 1966 theatrical version's screenplay.

Madame X is bad. But not because of Weld, who never gets to be protagonist and is mostly second-fiddle to the guest stars in her scenes. Second-billed Brett's good, but barely in it. Anhalt's script is a lot of the problem; Miller's direction is so detached it can't even be part of the problem. Van Dusen's bad. Parker's pretty good in the handful of scenes she has without Weld (not much of a *Return to Peyton Place* reunion for the pair). Len Cariou's good for a while. The script fails him. The script fails everyone.

The movie's never had a home video release, which is kind of surprising considering Tuesday Weld's the lead and there's some *Madame X* brand recognition. It has aired on television occasionally over the years, but infrequently. And certainly more in the eighties than since.

Over the next few years, Parker did some more guest spots. She appeared on "Love Boat" again in 1982, then her third and last "Fantasy Island" along with a "Hotel" in 1983. All of those episodes are available on DVD. In 1984, Parker guested on "Finder of Lost Loves," an Anthony Franciosa series on ABC; it lasted half a season. Nothing in 1985, but in 1986 Parker made it to Cabot Cove for her requisite appearance on "Murder, She Wrote." But for most of the

eighties, Parker was retired.

Her final screen appearance came in 1991, with her only foray into cable television—TNT’s *Dead on the Money*. The movie’s a spoof of romantic thrillers, with lead Amanda Pays visiting slick, wealthy beau Corbin Bernsen’s family estate. Parker once again plays wealthy matriarch. John Glover plays her other son, the goofy one. Kevin McCarthy is the father. Nothing is as it seems with the family and Pays might be in real danger. Will she figure out what’s going on in time to save herself? Mark Cullingham directs, with Gavin Lambert adapting a Rachel Ingalls novel.

Dead on the Money is a fun time; the implied danger works well with the humor. *Money* is a spoof on itself—a TV movie romantic thriller joshing the idea of TV movie romantic thrillers. Real-life couple Pays and Bernsen aren’t as good as everyone else, but both are likable. Glover’s great, McCarthy’s outstanding and strange (he’s barely in the movie). Parker has her moments, including some particularly good ones with McCarthy when they don’t have to be concerned about moving the plot forward.

When *Dead on the Money* aired in 1991, TNT was only three years old. They heavily promoted the movie, one of their first “originals.” Critical response was mixed—*Variety* didn’t like it, *The New York Times* wasn’t thrilled but appreciated Parker, McCarthy, and Sheree North. Subsequent video guides gave it decent capsule reviews. *Money* came out on VHS in the fall 1991, from Turner Home Entertainment, and even got a LaserDisc release the next spring. It’s never had a DVD release and doesn’t seem to have aired in decades, making it a lot rarer than it should be.

A few stinkers aside, Parker’s television movie appearances have a lot of charm to them. She didn’t get a lot of great roles but she got a handful of good ones, not just in the TV movies but also as a series guest star. It was a quiet, graceful second half to Parker’s fifty year career as an actor.

Still, it’s too bad some of this work isn’t more accessible—particularly *Dead on the Money*.

Posted. 24 March 2018.

Weblink. <https://thestopbutton.com/2018/03/24/sum-up-ep-pt4/>.

Gallery 4: 1971-91



Unhappy reunion: Bradbury, Parker, Cooper, and Field in *Maybe I'll Come Home in the Spring*.



Lots and lots of hugging in *Spring*.



Hill and Parker before he's *Vanished*.



Vanished: Interagency cooperation; Hooks and Farentino interview Parker.



It's the *Holidays* and Daddy's dying... who got the will?



Home For The Holidays: Walter and Parker.



Hostess: Parker in *Beauty Contest*.



The Great American Beauty Contest: Parker, Jordan, and contestants.



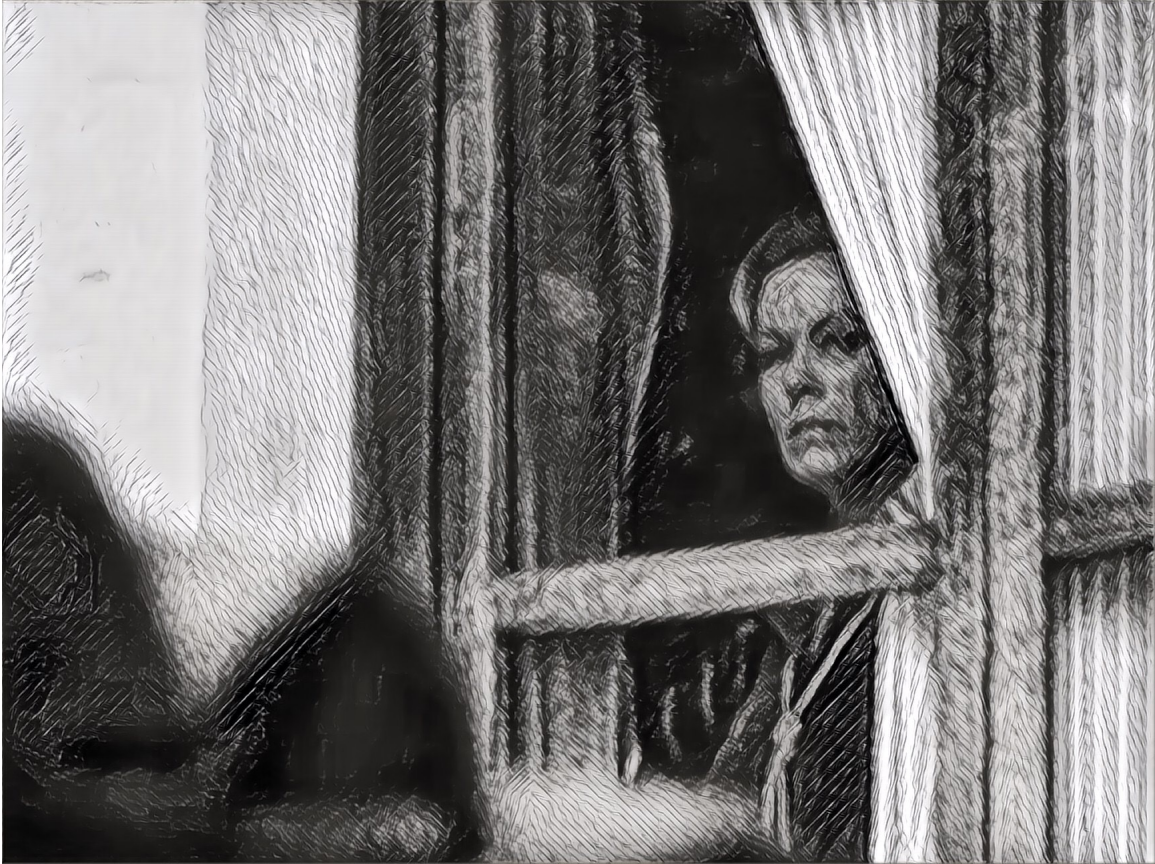
“Hi, Captain Stubing, how are Gopher and Doc?”



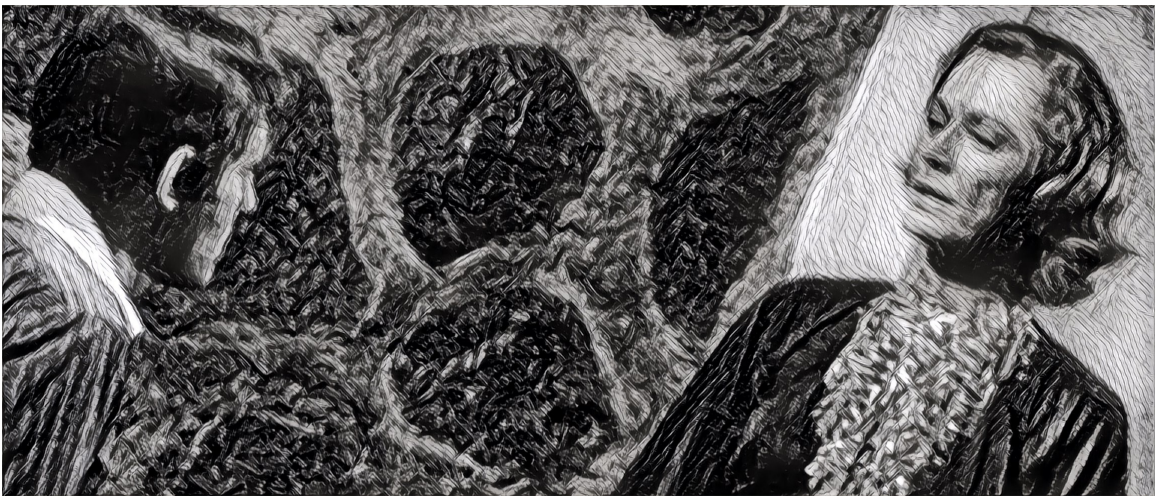
The Bastard: Parker in pouf.



Hussy and Parker before they eat cake in *The Bastard*.



Sunburn: Parker in a typically obstructed long shot.



Sunburn: Parker in her last theatrical scene, opposite Grodin.



Dressed To Kill: Parker chastises ever-shady Jonathan Banks.



Parker and the models are *Dressed To Kill*.



Once Upon A Spy: Parker, alone in her conference room.



Spy: Just imagine how obnoxious Danson mansplaining would've been every week.



Madame X: Cariou consults Parker (and her hat).



Weld does not get along with mother-in-law Parker in *Madame X*.



Money: McCarthy and Parker go hiking.



Parker's last screen appearance, laughing it up with Pays, in *Dead On The Money*.



Eleanor Parker: Oscar Nominee

Eleanor Parker did not win any Academy Awards, which is simultaneously obvious and inexplicable. The latter because she obviously deserved one (or six), the former because if she had won any, she'd have been better known in the eighties and nineties, when home video and basic cable drove classic film viewership. The first half of Parker's filmography, up to the point when she was nominated for 1955's *Interrupted Melody*, is full of great roles (once you get through some of the Warner contract stuff), while the second half has some sporadically potentially great roles. With the occasional role Parker made great (*Home from the Hill*, *Seventh Sin*). But in many ways, *Interrupted Melody*, which got Parker her third and final Best Actress nomination, was the pinnacle of her stardom. At least as an A-list actress who might get Best Actress nominations.

Melody also culminated Parker's fifties rise. She'd started at Warner Bros. In 1942 and worked her way from supporting in B movies, to supporting in A movies, to leading B movies, to leading A movies. But never Oscar bait. Though Parker should've been nominated for *Of Human Bondage* and *Woman in White*, even if it were a supporting nod for *White*. It wasn't until 1950's *Caged*, where Parker got to be the whole show, did she get a nomination for a Warner part. Parker plays a naive young woman sent to prison as an accessory to robbery. Her husband died in attempting said robbery. It's a phenomenal performance in an excellent film, one forgotten to history until it was resurrected thanks to DVD in the mid-2000s. The film's legacy suffered not just due to lack of home video release, but also because somehow it was pop-culturally misremembered as a camp classic. But DVD, eventually, corrected that mistake (and introduced a whole new generation of viewers to Parker).

If there was any question Warner hadn't been giving Parker the right roles—or supporting her in the right roles—it was resolved as Parker, fresh out of her contract, got nominated again the next year. No more Warner contract—her departure was in the cards before *Caged*—so she was free to star in Paramount's *Detective Story*. She plays brutal and honest New York cop Kirk Douglas's wife; the only one who can soothe the savage beast. Until one day things her past comes back to haunt her. It's a fantastic part, performance, film. Parker's not starting from naivety, which makes her character arc rather different than *Caged* (or, really, anything she'd had a chance to do before—even in *Three Secrets*,

which has some similarities to the *Story* role).

Parker had two films the next year—*Scaramouche* and *Above and Beyond*, both for MGM. Both were big hits, though *Scaramouche* was bigger, and both were well-received. There were Oscar rumblings for Parker in *Above and Beyond* but when it came time for nominations, she didn't get one. *Above and Beyond* was Parker's last drama for a few years—the adventure and adventure comedies she made for the next couple years seemed unlikely to get an Oscar nomination. So when Parker returned to drama—on a large scale—with *Interrupted Melody*, playing a contemporary figure (opera star Marjorie Lawrence, who had a triumphant return after polio), it certainly seemed like a good time for her to get an Oscar.

Only she didn't.

And she didn't get a nomination for *Man with the Golden Arm*, which came out the same year as *Melody* (it would have been a supporting nod), even though the part and performance were perfect for such recognition.

Parker not getting an award for either role is pretty much the tipping point as far as Oscar is concerned. The Academy either needed to acknowledge Parker or ignore her. They went with the latter. Because reality disappoints.

Parker tried with a couple more Oscar-friendly roles in the late fifties. She did *Lizzie*, a multiple personality drama. Joanne Woodward won Best Actress the same year for *Three Faces of Eve*, which was a similar part but a much better production. Then *Seventh Sin*, with Parker as a Somerset Maugham “heroine.” A little bit more production value and a lot better leading man (only because the existing one, Bill Travers, sucks the life out of the film) and it should've gotten Parker some attention. *Home from the Hill*, Parker's only potboiler—albeit a phenomenal one—seems both a natural and unlikely nomination.

After a brief stint at Fox in the early sixties, Parker wandered from studio to studio, part to part. Her most high profile sixties role—The Baroness in *The Sound of Music*—would also be her most indelible. Even though the part's not great. *Sound of Music* was a mega-hit, leading to most people who knew Parker remembering her from that film, nothing else. Though as time went on, it was less and less likely they'd seen her in anything else.

Parker's last Oscar possibility was probably 1966's *An American Dream*, but done in thanks to the movie being godawful. But it was definitely the type of

role the Academy would soon be recognizing (just the next year, actually, with Anne Bancroft in *The Graduate*). But, again, *Dream* was godawful so it didn't work out.

Parker herself was somewhat infamously known for not caring about the Hollywood game. As she told a reporter in April 1955, "I'd like to win an Academy Award, of course—who wouldn't? But it will never become an obsession with me."

Still, history suffers for her never having won one, not just for how it might have changed the trajectory of her career—leading to even more great performances—but also gotten people interested in her work before the DVD boom indirectly helped Parker, her talent, and her skill get their due.

I didn't talk about the performances who won against Parker in the three Academy Award ceremonies for a couple reasons. First, I'm not just not interested in arm-chairing those wins, I'm not even informed enough on the performances to do so. Second, given Parker wasn't ever an Oscar-chaser, it seems inappropriate to get too worked up about her not winning. Especially since, frankly, it was bullshit when she didn't get a nomination for *Of Human Bondage* back in 1947.

There are a lot of ways to talk about Eleanor Parker and the Oscars, even without getting into the contemporary newspaper and magazine articles. The trivia alone about Parker and her co-nominees could go on forever. But fixating on the subject seems a waste of time—just like Parker thought—one's time is much better spent seeing some Eleanor Parker movies.

Posted. 22 February 2019.

Weblink. <https://thestopbutton.com/2019/02/22/ep-oscars/>.



At MGM, 1952-60

I grew up avoiding Eleanor Parker movies. At least the one everyone knew about—my mom and my sister used to watch *The Sound of Music* all the time. My dad and I avoided it for years. When I did discover Eleanor Parker in the late nineties, I can't remember the order in which I saw her films. I know I ordered a bunch of LaserDiscs from Ken Crane's, including *The Sound of Music*, but I can't remember the viewing order.

But *Scaramouche* would have been one of the early ones I saw. I've always loved *Scaramouche*; given I remember seeing it multiple times before "The Stop Button" (and once since), I almost think I saw it first on VHS and then on the MGM LaserDisc. I distinctly remember not getting the out of print Criterion *Scaramouche*.

Growing up, about the only fifties movies I saw were Universal sci-fi pictures and maybe some Hitchcock, so *Scaramouche* was a revelation. It's visually lush but also sincere and thoughtful in its storytelling. It trusts its audience.

I first learned about Eleanor Parker in an article in a magazine called "Films of the Golden Age." The article had a lengthy discussion of her career, so I knew she started in the forties with Warner Bros., but her most easily accessible (save *Sound of Music*) films were her MGM films from the 1950s. They were big enough pictures to get VHS releases and often LaserDisc ones.

Above and Beyond was readily available on VHS. It had a painted cover, so it wasn't a quick MGM/UA classics release. They didn't really have those with VHS releases; I don't think any big studios got around to releasing EP copies of stuff. Well, maybe Orion Home Video did.. I know I saw it relatively soon. It's now out from Warner Archive. I've seen it at least three times. It's diametrically opposed from *Scaramouche*. It's not lush, though it is still bright. It's dark, it's depressing, it's not playful. I'd only seen fifties melodramas, usually from Universal (on pre-commercials AMC) so *Above and Beyond* was a surprise. I've seen it get some gruff over the years (at least people are seeing it), but it's a fantastic film.

I remember both *Escape from Fort Bravo* and *Valley of the Kings* being rather easy to find. There were VHS releases of both and maybe a LaserDisc release of *Fort Bravo*. I went with the VHS on it because I was under the impression the film was 1.37:1, though it was actually an early 1.66:1. The LaserDisc wasn't

1.66:1 so I was fine. It's since come out on DVD widescreen.

Fort Bravo is another awesome film; it got me on a John Sturges kick (which *Magnificent Seven* ended—*Seven* always ends my Sturges kicks). William Holden, discovering John Forsythe wasn't always a cheesy nighttime soap opera star. *Fort Bravo*'s got a complex, strong story. It's beautifully paced. By college, I had seen a number of Westerns (thanks AMC), but when I saw *Fort Bravo* I had probably only seen the Leone *Dollars* trilogy. I was not a Western fan. I was very hesitant towards the genre. *Fort Bravo*, with its strong character development, changed my mind on the subject. It's also about the only calvary movie I've ever seen I can tolerate.

Valley of the Kings, even though it's got Parker and Robert Taylor—and even though I was forgiving of the film the first time I saw it (maybe the first two times)—is fairly awful stuff. It's the bad fifties melodrama just with a good pair of leads. I remember that “Films of the Golden Age” article being gently disparaging to it and I responded similarly. The last time I saw it, however... well, it is (I think) the only Eleanor Parker movie made after 1950 with a single ★ rating.

After *Valley of the Kings* came *Many Rivers to Cross*, the last of Parker and Taylor's films together. It's also sort of the peak of Parker's MGM career as a leading lady. There's no real hook to it—it's a frontier “Northwestern” adventure comedy—besides its cast. It's okay enough. It took me forever to track it down because TCM stubbornly refused to air it for a few years. I remember having a letterbox recording of it until the film got released on DVD, rather soon considering neither Eleanor Parker or Robert Taylor have modern fan followings. It was when Warner was doing amazing releases just because they could.

Parker's next film in the fifties for MGM was *Interrupted Melody*, which featured greatly into the article in “Films of the Golden Age” and could very well be the first Parker film I saw. MGM had a beautiful LaserDisc release of the film. I don't know if I'd seen much Glenn Ford at that time; I do remember Roger Moore being a bit of a surprise.

Melody is a fantastic film. I sort of remember having it on VHS, but I might just be remembering the video store having it on VHS and me putting it on my recommendations shelf. I can't imagine seeing the film pan and scan, it's such gorgeous widescreen. I would have avoided *Melody* earlier because of the

singing. Luckily I'd gotten over the "no musicals" hurdle of my film viewing.

I've read *Woman of a Thousand Faces*, Doug McClelland's book about Parker—I think I read it while still seeing her films—so if something significant happened after *Interrupted Melody*, it seems like it'd be reported in that book. I think I have it out of storage. But even without the book, it's clear MGM stopped giving Parker such high profile roles, which is kind of dumb (*Melody* was her last, of three, best actress nominations—she lost to Anna Magnani, who I don't think I've ever seen in anything).

The "Films of the Golden Age" article was complementary about *Lizzie*, Parker's multiple personality thriller. It took me years to see it (I think TCM just aired it one day, not part of a Parker marathon) and it didn't impress. It's the only film I haven't seen since starting "The Stop Button;" Warner Archive has never gotten around to it.

They also haven't gotten around to *The Seventh Sin*, which is one of those "too late" movies. It's Eleanor Parker and George Sanders finally doing a movie together, after their "primes." It's good too. I just read David Lewis crap-mouthing it in his memoirs, but it's good. It's a Maugham adaptation. It's far from perfect, but Parker and Sanders in a Maugham adaptation? No one can mess that one up.

Sadly, the film's not available widescreen anywhere. TCM still airs a pan and scan print. It was apparently a big bomb for MGM back in the fifties and Sanders is a weird draw. He has a very solid modern fanbase, but not a wide one. It's focused.

It'd be very cool to see it OAR.

The last Parker MGM film—ever, actually—is *Home from the Hill*. I saw *Home from the Hill* really early on too, just because MGM had a nice LaserDisc release of it. It's since had a great DVD release, which is particularly nice for me—my LaserDisc had begun to rot by the time I transferred it onto DVD-R.

Hill was a weird film. It has Anthony Perkins, George Peppard and Robert Mitchum. Okay, Mitchum wasn't weird to see in a film, but seeing Perkins and Peppard? It was strange. I only knew them for their crappy work. The "A-Team" is real crappy. I wasn't even allowed to watch it because it was so dumb.

It's a great film and was one I made people watch. It also introduced me to Harriet Frank Jr. and Irving Ravetch, who wrote a number of good films.

The eight years of Parker's MGM films—*Scaramouche* in 1952 to *Home from the Hill* in 1960—feature some of her best work, but they were also a great introduction to Hollywood filmmaking of that era.

When I first saw these films, I hadn't seen anything like them. Going back and seeing them again over the last ten years, I still haven't seen anything like them. There's a distinctness to the films thanks to Parker; many of the films are beautifully made and acted by all parties, but Parker makes them all different from each other.

Posted. 16 July 2015.

Weblink. <https://thestopbutton.com/2015/07/16/stop-button-lists-eleanor-parker-at-mgm-1952-60/>.



Above and Beyond

1952, Melvin Frank, Norman Panama

★★★★

Above and Beyond breaks one of my severest rules—don't start with narration and then drop it. *Above and Beyond* starts with Eleanor Parker narrating the film, mostly because otherwise she wouldn't be in it for the first hour. Once she is in the film full-time, the narration quickly disappears. I can't remember the last time there was narration, but I don't think it was past an hour and twenty minutes, which leaves about forty percent absent of narration. The film's about the guy who dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima. I'm not up enough on my World War II history (from the American perspective) to know where the film made allowances, but it creates a compelling enough reality of its own. In many ways, the character's saddled with more immediate responsibility than anyone else ever had before, which creates the condition for its success even though it fails on certain narrative levels.

The audience knows what's going on and understands what Robert Taylor (as the pilot and commander) is going through. Except Eleanor Parker, as his wife, doesn't know and the story—for a good portion—is from her emotional perspective. The film takes place over two years, with only the last hour being told in scenic detail. The rest is summary, occasionally tied together with Parker's narration, occasionally not. The film isn't quite a biopic, because it's Parker holding the first hour together. Though Robert Taylor gets a lot more screen-time (maybe ninety-five percent overall), Parker's a constant. The scenes with the two of them together, therefore, have to be perfect. They have to establish them as a married couple, they have to establish them as characters worth caring about—and co-writers and co-directors Norman Panama and Melvin Frank pull off those scenes. Maybe five minutes in that first hour is dedicated to

such scenes and Panama and Frank get the work done.

Parker's an obviously choice as the film's best performance because she gets to do so much—play wife, play fighting wife, play new mother, play friend—while Taylor only has two general moods: upset and more upset. But Taylor's performance is the better one—not through any fault of Parker's, but because Frank and Panama understand how to address the gravity of the situation. It's through little moments with Taylor.

The film came out in 1952 and has either a complex morality about the actual bombing or an undecided one. It accepts most reasoning on the subject will end up being flippant, but the film's not about the overall morality, but the character's. Occasionally when you turn a big story—a too big story—into a movie, something gels and it holds. *Above and Beyond* is probably the best of that rather specific genre. Frank and Panama manage to maintain nice filmic sensibilities throughout—giving the audience something to laugh at, making the marriage compelling—while appreciating they can't actually tell their story... because it's too big.

Credits. Directed by Melvin Frank and Norman Panama; written by Frank, Panama and Beirne Lay Jr.; director of photography, Ray June; edited by Cotton Warburton; music by Hugo Friedhofer; produced by Frank, Panama and Allan Fung; released by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. Starring Robert Taylor (Col. Paul W. Tibbets Jr), Eleanor Parker (Lucy Tibbets), James Whitmore (Maj. Uanna), Larry Keating (Maj. Gen. Vernon C. Brent), Larry Gates (Capt. Parsons), Marilyn Erskine (Marge Bratton), Stephen Dunne (Maj. Harry Bratton), Robert Burton (Gen. Samuel E. Roberts), Hayden Rorke (Dr. Ramsey), Larry Dobkin (Dr. Van Dyke), Jack Raine (Dr. Fiske), Jonathan Cott (Dutch Van Kirk), Jeff Richards (Thomas Ferebee), Dick Simmons (Bob Lewis), John McKee (Wyatt Duzenbury), Patrick Conway (Radio Operator), Christie Olsen (Paul Tibbets Jr), William Lester (Driver), Barbara Ruick (Mary Malone) and Jim Backus (Gen. Curtis E. LeMay).

Genre. Classics.

Posted. 26 August 2006.

Weblink. <https://thestopbutton.com/2006/08/26/above-and-beyond-1952/>.

Descriptors. Above and Beyond, Eleanor Parker, Hayden Rorke, James Whitmore, Jeff Richards, Jim Backus, Larry Keating, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, Robert Taylor.

Home video availability. DVD, streaming.



An American Dream

1966, Robert Gist

I can't believe I've never heard of Stuart Whitman before—I just went through his filmography and nothing jumped out (except *Interrupted Melody* and it's a bit part, but going to be amusing in a moment)—anyway, I can't believe I've never heard of him because he's kind of like a Glenn Ford who can't act. *An American Dream* is no winner—after a wonderful opening, one suggesting director Robert Gist was going to do something interesting in terms of filmmaking—but Whitman is real awful. Janet Leigh's terrible too, but her bad performance is clearly the script. Whitman's bad performance is all his own.

Eleanor Parker is in it for a bit (she plays Whitman's wife who he murders) and she's got some amusing scenes, making the melodramatic trashiness of the film entertaining, but once she goes it becomes intolerable. The nice Johnny Mandel score also changes around that point too, becoming annoying and predictable instead of understated and thoughtful.

Gist turns out to be a sixties director in the worst sense, the kind who can't—in traditional TV scene situation—think of setups besides the ones on television. Gist directed mostly TV, so there's a reason for it, but that opening certainly suggested otherwise. For the first five minutes, I thought everything I'd heard about the film was wrong....

But it isn't.

There are so many heinous performances in the film I can't list them all, but Joe De Santis is extraordinary. Only Murray Hamilton and Parker—in many ways, more so Hamilton—emerge unscathed.

It's truly something awful, though, I suppose, an interesting example of a bad period of American filmmaking. Like now, when music videos have come to define cinematic style in bad movies, except it was television defining artless style....

Amazing opening though.

Credits. Directed by Robert Gist; screenplay by Mann Rubin, based on the novel by Norman Mailer; director of photography, Sam Leavitt; edited by George R. Rohrs; music by Johnny Mandel; produced by William Conrad; released by Warner Bros. Starring Stuart Whitman (Stephen Richard Rojack), Janet Leigh (Cherry McMahan), Eleanor Parker (Deborah Rojack), Barry Sullivan (Lieutenant Roberts), Lloyd Nolan (Barney Kelly), Murray Hamilton (Arthur Kabot), Joe De Santis (Eddie Ganucci), J.D. Cannon (Police Sergeant Walt Leznicki), Susan Denberg (Ruta), Les Crane (Nicky) and Warren Stevens (Johnny Dell).

Genre. Drama.

Posted. 28 September 2007.

Weblink. <https://thestopbutton.com/2007/09/28/an-american-dream-1966/>.

Descriptors. An American Dream, Barry Sullivan, Eleanor Parker, Janet Leigh, Lloyd Nolan, Murray Hamilton, Norman Mailer, Stuart Whitman, Warner Bros., William Conrad.

Home video availability. DVD, streaming.



The Bastard

1978, Lee H. Katzin

Somewhere in the second half of *The Bastard*, the mini-series starts to wear you down and you just give in. The first half is set in 1772 Europe, first in France, then in England. Andrew Stevens is a French boy with a secret. His mom might just be Patricia Neal, inn keeper, but Stevens is actually heir to a great British title. He's just a bastard for now. Soon, he'll be a duke.

In other words, the first half of *The Bastard* is a bunch of weak accents (for the most part) and Southern California standing in for the French countryside, British estates, French estates, the British countryside, and London itself. Oddly, *The Bastard* isn't a grandly budget mini-series. It's got nice sets and some creative location shooting, but it's far from opulent. Director Katzin probably wouldn't know what to do with the extra money anyway.

It feels, especially in the first half, very much like a TV show you don't really want to watch. Until about an hour into the movie, Stevens is just around to whine, get seduced, seduce, patronize, and get henpecked by Neal. Neal doesn't even try a French accent. Stevens goes for it and fails, but for a second he gets some credit for the enthusiasm. Then the accent starts to slip and the credit goes away.

When they get to England, they meet Eleanor Parker and Mark Neely. Parker does a British accent, Neely doesn't, which is good because Neely's bad enough without a weak accent. Parker's a nice cameo; *Bastard* has some good small parts. But if you're around too long, *The Bastard* gets you. The script eventually gets Neal, who's got a weak character in the first place, but Katzin's direction, Guerdon Trueblood's teleplay... Neal never gets a good moment.

Anyway. They go to London, they meet Donald Pleasence (who's cute) and Tom Bosley. Bosley's all in as Benjamin Franklin, down to the air baths—his enthusiasm, no one else's, can defeat *The Bastard*. Shame he's only got four scenes in three hours. Then they go to the colonies for the second half.

Oh, right, Stevens sleeps with Olivia Hussey too. She's his half-brother's fiancée who likes French boys. Stevens is supposed to be seventeen or eighteen at the start of *The Bastard*. He was twenty-three. He looks about twenty-eight with the tan. His young lothario thing is a weird script addition given it looks like a soap opera whenever Katzin does a seduction scene. Except maybe the first one.

Second half has William Shatner as Paul Revere. And it features a William Shatner enthusiastic horse backing riding sequence. It's kind of awesome. Shatner's not bad either. He's extremely likable, which gets him over some of the bumps in the script. And he's also not in it too much.

Ditto Buddy Ebsen as Stevens's American mentor. Or Noah Beery Jr. Even Peter Bonerz leaves a good impression.

Strangely, William Daniels is a complete flop and he's got a lot fewer scenes than anyone else.

The second half also brings Kim Cattrall as an actual love interest for Stevens. She doesn't get seduced until they've had something like five scenes together, while the previous conquests fell at one and two, respectively. Cattrall's kind of likable. She's not good so much as she's trying harder than anyone else. There are so many historical figures, the script is entirely caricature, Katzin's not interested in the performances, seeing someone occasionally try. It helps.

But then *The Bastard* gets Cattrall too.

Stevens gets okay for a while, when it's all the American Revolution flashcards. He doesn't get good, but he gets okay. And then the script throws him a real curveball and the development—in Stevens's performance, him, the script, probably not Katzin, come on—drags him under. It also drags *The Bastard* under, which is appropriate, since Stevens is the *Bastard*.

You know, Johnny Carson's right. Sometimes, you do just like being able to say bastard.

Credits. Directed by Lee H. Katzin; teleplay by Guerdon Trueblood, based on the novel by John Jakes; director of photography, Michel Hugo; edited by Michael Murphy and Robert F. Shugrue; music by John

Addison; produced by Joe Byrne; aired by the National Broadcasting Company. Starring Andrew Stevens (Phillipe Charboneau), Kim Cattrall (Anne Ware), Patricia Neal (Marie Charboneau), Olivia Hussey (Alicia), Buddy Ebsen (Benjamin Edes), Donald Pleasence (Solomon Sholto), William Shatner (Paul Revere), Harry Morgan (Capt. Caleb), Eleanor Parker (Lady Amberly), Mark Neely (Roger Amberly), John de Lancie (Lt. Stark), Ike Eisenmann (Gil, The Marquis de LaFayette), Peter Bonerz (Girard), James Gregory (Will Campbell), Carole Tru Foster (Daisy O'Brien), Charles Haid (George Lumden), Noah Beery Jr. (Dan O'Brien), Herbert Jefferson Jr. (Lucas), Barry Sullivan (Abraham Ware), Lorne Greene (Bishop Francis), Cameron Mitchell (Capt. Plummer), William Daniels (Samuel Adams), Keenan Wynn (Johnny Malcolm), Russell Johnson (Col. James Barrett), and Tom Bosley (Benjamin Franklin).

Genre. Television.

Posted. 14 April 2017.

Weblink. <https://thestopbutton.com/2017/04/14/bastard-1978/>.

Descriptors. Harry Morgan, Kim Cattrall, Lorne Greene, Michael Murphy, NBC, Olivia Hussey, Patricia Neal, The Bastard, William Shatner.

Home video availability. DVD, streaming.



Between Two Worlds

1944, Edward A. Blatt



Between Two Worlds has some nostalgic value for me. When I first discovered Eleanor Parker (through an article in the magazine, “Films of the Golden Age,” which I’ve had to drop for its insane right-wing, fascist values), *Between Two Worlds* was somehow one of the first of her films I came across. It’s early in her career, when Warner Bros. was done using her in the one-hour B films and moved her up to the two-hour ones. However, it’s not Parker who stands out in *Two Worlds*, it’s John Garfield.

Between Two Worlds is a play adaptation, but doesn’t feel too much like one. It does, however, have two protagonists (Garfield and Paul Henreid). Garfield isn’t the film’s intended protagonist—it doesn’t open or close with him—but his performance is so strong, he takes the lead in a few sections. Henreid is okay, I guess, playing a character somewhat like Victor Laszlo, but Parker, as his wife, doesn’t seem to know much about him. The play is from 1924 (*Outward Bound*) and they updated it for World War II, so some of the tripping can be attributed to that adaptation.

Regardless, the film is too long. Some sections breeze past—whenever Garfield’s running it or when Sydney Greenstreet’s there—but others, mostly the ones with Henreid, clog. Parker’s got a great scene to herself at the end and there are a lot of good performances. Faye Emerson, who appeared in at least two other films with Parker and Garfield, is particularly frustrating. Sometimes she does good work, sometimes she does bad. She leaves on a good note and so does *Between Two Worlds*. I had to force myself to remember its faults.

Credits. Directed by Edward A. Blatt; screenplay by Daniel Fuchs, from a play by Sutton Vane; director

of photography, Carl Guthrie; edited by Rudi Fehr; music by Erich Wolfgang Korngold; produced by Mark Hellinger; released by Warner Bros. Starring John Garfield (Tom Prior), Paul Henreid (Henry), Sydney Greenstreet (Thompson), Eleanor Parker (Ann), Edmund Gwenn (Scrubby), George Tobias (Pete Musick), George Coulouris (Lingley), Faye Emerson (Maxine) and Sara Allgood (Mrs. Midget).

Genre. Classics.

Posted. 30 December 2005.

Weblink. <https://thestopbutton.com/2005/12/30/between-two-worlds-1944/>.

Descriptors. Between Two Worlds, Edmund Gwenn, Eleanor Parker, Faye Emerson, George Tobias, John Garfield, Paul Henreid, Sydney Greenstreet, Warner Bros.

Home video availability. DVD.



Busses Roar

1942, D. Ross Lederman



Busses Roar is a slight propaganda film. It doesn't fully commit to any of its subplots, not even the patriotism. With the exception of the establishing the villainous Japanese, German and the gangster at the opening and the flag-waving speech at the end, it's not too heavy on it.

Most of the film's almost an hour runtime takes place in a bus terminal. The gangster (Rex Williams, who isn't any good, but isn't as bad as the film's worst) has to take a bus to deliver a bomb to some oil fields. There's the whole range of bus passengers to put in danger, but the actual bus in crisis sequence is hurried. Director Lederman does a lot better establishing all the characters.

Most of that action is Julie Bishop trying to get someone to buy her a ticket. Her character is the smartest part of George Bilson and Anthony Coldeway's script, just because they can introduce so many supporting cast members through her storyline.

Ignoring its overtly bigoted elements, the film has some decent performances and moments. For example, the storyline with newlyweds Harry Lewis and Elisabeth Fraser isn't bad at all.

The most hilariously awful performance is probably Peter Whitney as the German spy.

Richard Travis gets top-billing—and is Bishop's eventual love interest—and he manages to be both weak as a leading man, but somewhat likable.

Unfortunately the big action finale is ineptly and cheaply executed; the bus depot scenes look perfectly good.

Roar it doesn't. More like gurgle.

Credits. Directed by D. Ross Lederman; screenplay by George Bilson and Anthony Coldeway, based on a story by Coldeway; director of photography, James Van Trees; edited by James Gibbon; released by Warner Bros. Starring Richard Travis (Sergeant Ryan), Julie Bishop (Reba Richards), Charles Drake (Eddie Sloan), Eleanor Parker (Norma), Elisabeth Fraser (Betty), Richard Fraser (Dick Remick), Peter Whitney (Frederick Hoff), Frank Wilcox (Detective Quinn), Willie Best (Sunshine), Rex Williams (Jerry Silva), Harry Lewis (Danny), Bill Kennedy (The Moocher), George Meeker (Nick Stoddard), Vera Lewis (Mrs. Dipper), Harry C. Bradley (Henry Dipper), Lottie Williams (First Old Maid), Leah Baird (Second Old Maid) and Chester Gan (Yamanito).

Genre. Classics.

Posted. 8 August 2014.

Weblink. <https://thestopbutton.com/2014/08/08/busses-roar-1942/>.

Descriptors. Bill Kennedy, Busses Roar, Charles Drake, Eleanor Parker, Harry Lewis, Julie Bishop, Peter Whitney, Warner Bros., Willie Best.

Home video availability. None.



Caged

1950, John Cromwell

★★★★★

Max Steiner does the music for *Caged*, which is strange to think about because *Caged* barely has any music. Director Cromwell instead emphasizes the silence, especially as the film opens. Right after the opening credits, which do have music, *Caged* gets very quiet. “Silence” reads all the walls in the women’s prison where protagonist Eleanor Parker finds herself. At its most obvious, one could say *Caged* is the story of Parker going from first time offender to repeat offender, which is besides the point. Parker’s fate is decided right from the start. There are four principal characters in *Caged*, two inmates, two prison employees. None of them have any free will, it’s just how they come to realize it.

Cromwell, thanks to Carl E. Guthrie’s photography and Owen Marks’s editing, is able to do a lot with the filmmaking. *Caged*’s silences—waiting for a noise, praying for more silence—is just one of the many techniques Cromwell uses to get the viewer into the cage with Parker and everyone else. *Caged* should feel stagy at times; same sets, over and over. The outside world is just a glimpse and a bland glimpse at that. There’s not even a world over the wall, when the inmates are in the yard. They, along with the viewer, know there’s a world out there but it’s left to the imagination for everyone. *Caged* just concerns this place and these people.

Virginia Kellogg’s screenplay juxtaposes innocent Parker and Agnes Moorehead’s compassionate superintendent. Both women have bad role models—Parker has Betty Garde’s hardened con woman while brutal matron Hope Emerson wants to sway Moorehead back to viciousness. Once it becomes clear Parker isn’t just the subject of the film—*Caged* might have some social

commentary to make, but it isn't trying to propagandize—but the protagonist and the viewer has to stick with her, follow her hardening, it becomes even more frightening. Most of the scares happen in the first half of the film, but the second half, as despondence sets in, is even more terrifying.

Parker is singular. There aren't adjectives to describe her performance. Moorehead's great, Emerson's great, Garde's great. The supporting cast is all good. Look fast for Jane Darwell.

Caged is an outstanding film.

Credits. Directed by John Cromwell; screenplay by Virginia Kellogg, based on a story by Kellogg and Bernard C. Schoenfeld; director of photography, Carl E. Guthrie; edited by Owen Marks; music by Max Steiner; produced by Jerry Wald; released by Warner Bros. Starring Eleanor Parker (Marie Allen), Agnes Moorehead (Ruth Benton), Hope Emerson (Evelyn Harper), Betty Garde (Kitty Stark), Ellen Corby (Emma Barber), Jan Sterling (Smoochie), Olive Deering (June Roberts) and Lee Patrick (Elvira Powell).

Genre. Classics.

Posted. 19 June 2016.

Weblink. <https://thestopbutton.com/2016/06/19/caged-1950/>.

Descriptors. Agnes Moorehead, Caged, Eleanor Parker, Ellen Corby, Jan Sterling, John Cromwell, Lee Patrick, Max Steiner, Warner Bros.

Home video availability. DVD, streaming.



Chain Lightning

1950, Stuart Heisler

★★½

Both critically and popularly, *Chain Lightning* gets classified as one of Bogart's lesser, late 1940s films. While the film certainly is a star vehicle for Bogart, it's only "lesser" if one compares it to Bogart's stellar films (basically, the ones everyone remembers). On its own, *Chain Lightning* is far from perfect, but it's a fine film. Director Stuart Heisler can direct some good scenes—since the film's about a test pilot, there's a lot of Bogart-only scenes, which Heisler handles (he has trouble when it's a group scene). The special effects are quite good and they're another thing Heisler incorporates well. I was about to say he didn't do the romance scenes right, but there's one scene between Bogart and Eleanor Parker where I can say I've never seen the shots before or since, so he does good on that aspect too.

The problems with *Chain Lightning* come from its lack of prestige. It's about a test pilot, Bogart's the only "star," as Parker probably wouldn't become a star for another year or two. (Apparently, *Chain Lightning's* release was even held up for a year). The film's got some really dynamic character relationships—between Bogart and Parker (he abandoned her in Europe during the war when he went home for no reason other than laziness), between Parker and Bogart's rival Richard Whorf, and between Bogart and Whorf. Except none of the relationships are standard—Whorf, for instance, thinks the world of Bogart's pilot, while never doubting Parker will choose him (even though, obviously, the audience knows different). Bogart gets to come across as petty and mercenary, to degrees I don't think I've ever seen him go before (even in *Casablanca*, which is probably the best comparison). It's just too short.

At ninety-five minutes, with multiple special effects sequences and a five or six year present action (some takes place during the war, then in 1950... sorry, 1949), it's way too short. There's not enough fat on the script to pad out the film, so it's just the one straight gesture and the writers can't quite make it work without hokey voiceovers and narration. For some of it, most of it in the middle, actually, I kept thinking it was so much better than I remembered it being (then the final act came around). Still, it's certainly not a bad or even mediocre film. It has a lot going for it.

Credits. Directed by Stuart Heisler; written by Liam O'Brien and Vincent B. Evans, from a story by Lester Cole; director of photography, Ernest Haller; edited by Thomas Reilly; music by David Buttolph; produced by Anthony Veiller; released by Warner Bros. Starring Humphrey Bogart (Matt Brennan), Eleanor Parker (Jo Holloway), Raymond Massey (Leland Willis), Richard Whorf (Carl Troxall), James Brown (Major Hinkle), Roy Roberts (Gen. Hewitt), Morris Ankrum (Ed Bostwick), Fay Baker (Mrs. Willis) and Fred E. Sherman (Jeb Farley).

Genre. Classics.

Posted. 22 November 2016.

Weblink. <https://thestopbutton.com/2006/11/22/chain-lightning-1950/>.

Descriptors. Chain Lightning, Eleanor Parker, Humphrey Bogart, James Brown, Liam O'Brien, Raymond Massey, Roy Roberts, Thomas Reilly, Warner Bros.

Home video availability. DVD.



Crime by Night

1944, William Clemens



Jerome Cowan's detective in *Crime by Night* slides through the film soaked in bourbon. While the film's mystery isn't a bad one, perfect for a seventy minute running time, the suggestions of off-screen actions are a lot more fun to think about. The detective, with his love interest secretary along (played well by Jane Wyman, who manages ditzy humor without coming off dumb) manages to find time to romance the hotel operator, get to know all the bar staff intimately, and generally just settle himself in to small town life, enough he doesn't seem alien to it when he's investigating in it. The film rarely deviates from the era's standard—we follow the detective, finding clues with him (not always getting to piece things together as quickly as he does, though all the necessary information is actually presented to the audience in *Crime by Night*, it's so obvious), but the private life of the detective is—to a degree—kept from the audience. It's a different approach, especially since Cowan's detective is only likable in his dealings with the country bumpkins (he uses electoral competition to get paid more for investigating) and it's Wyman who's the likable character throughout. Given Cowan's practically goofy performance, it's easy to read the detective as a drunk jerk. The best thing about him is he brings Wyman around and he's better than the country bumpkins. Still, at the end of *Crime by Night*, I still found myself wishing Warner had done more films with Cowan and Wyman.

I'm trying to think if the film does one unexpected thing, or even one unique thing, but, like most of the Warner b-movies from the early 1940s, it's really a crock pot of reused ideas. The competing politicians are a comedic subplot out of something else, the family troubles precipitating the falsely accused client of Cowan's (which is a recycling of a *Thin Man* plot, probably two or three or six

of them) are such a non-starter the kid in the custody battle never even shows up... which is unfortunate, because Eleanor Parker, at this age, is always worth seeing working with kids—but what’s more interesting is the film forgets about the kid, just like it forgets about the inheritance after it’s introduced in the case set-up. obviously, there’s a far amount of editing incompetence, maybe there were cut scenes or maybe everyone forgot, because those scenes weren’t fun. Cowan hadn’t come out as a drunk in the opening; he wasn’t very serious, but he certainly wasn’t as goofy as immediately following. In any event, it doesn’t matter... the seventy minute b-movie needs to entertain and engage, which *Crime by Night* does, mostly with its cast.

Wyman’s incredibly personable performance aside, there’s also Parker as the suspicious, shady daughter of the victim. She’s one of the film’s villains, the detective’s foils, throughout, and she manages to bring some depth to a shallow role (you almost believe she has a kid somewhere, while she’s off with the nightclub singer). At the end, for her big scene, director Clemens makes his only terrible directing misstep—he inexplicably shoots her from the ground up. It looks funny; the camera on the floor appears to be the perspective of Cowan’s left shoe. Faye Emerson is unfortunately disappointing as one of Cowan’s extracurricular activities and Charles Lang is too bland, but Stuart Crawford is good as the falsely accused and Cy Kendall is amusing as the slow-witted sheriff.

I just checked IMDb and *Night* is the only one with these characters. Too bad. It’s a fine setup for a series.

Credits. Directed by William Clemens; screenplay by Richard Weil and Joel Malone, from a novel by Daniel Mainwaring; director of photography, Henry Sharp; edited by Doug Gould; music by William Lava; produced by William Jacobs; released by Warner Bros. Starring Jane Wyman (Robbie Vance), Jerome Cowan (Sam Campbell), Faye Emerson (Ann Marlow), Charles Lang (Paul Goff), Eleanor Parker (Irene Carr), Stuart Crawford (Larry Borden), Cy Kendall (Sheriff Max Ambers), Charles C. Wilson (District Attorney Hyatt) and Fred Kelsey (Dad Martin).

Genre. Classics.

Posted. 15 August 2007.

Weblink. <https://thestopbutton.com/2007/08/15/crime-by-night-1944/>.

Descriptors. Charles Lang, Crime by Night, Eleanor Parker, Faye Emerson, Jane Wyman, Jerome Cowan, Richard Weil, Warner Bros., William Jacobs.

Home video availability. None.



Dead on the Money

1991, Mark Cullingham



I'm reading the only online review of *Dead on the Money* (well, only other once I post this one, I suppose)—it was a Turner Original Picture, airing on TNT and it's not on DVD, so I suppose it's somewhat rare—and the reviewer complains the “atmosphere of humor makes it difficult to take the film all that seriously.” Unfortunately, the reviewer seems to have missed the point of *Dead on the Money*. I'm sure there's a word for it, but I don't know it, but what *Dead on the Money* does is spoof the type of movie called *Dead on the Money*. The source novella (Rachel Ingalls' *The End of Tragedy*) seems—from my Googling—to have a similar philosophy, but *Dead on the Money* has a better title and the all important cast.

Amanda Pays was, at the time, one of those actresses who popped up on lots of TV shows—she was on “The Flash” and she was on “Max Headroom.” I can't remember how she was on “The Flash,” but in *Dead on the Money*, she's more charming than good. It's not a particular problem, because she's in on the joke. The film probably got some publicity because it also stars—as her romantic interest—her real-life husband, Corbin Bernsen. Bernsen is in on the joke too, but he's not Cary Grant and he sort of needed to be... However, John Glover is perfect in the film, playing a goofy, mama's boy with a gambling addiction. But it's not a serious gambling addiction of course (there's nothing serious in the film)—Glover's character just sort of assumes that role. Kevin McCarthy plays Glover's father and it's McCarthy in his second career prime. He's only in the film for about five minutes but he's hilarious in every second of them.

The reason I saw *Dead on the Money* in the first place is Eleanor Parker. In

her last role to date, she plays Glover's mother. It's probably the least showy main role in the film and Parker does a great job with it. There are a couple scenes with she and McCarthy alone and, free of the plot constraints, she just opens up, appreciating the goofiness. Parker also gets to laugh at the film's absurdity at the end, along with Pays, in a nice scene (though it's not one of Pays' better moments in the film).

Dead on the Money is an oddly rewarding experience. It's a somewhat small reward—I'm not sure the romantic thriller genre really needed to be sardonically analyzed in a romantic thriller—but it's still worth it. For the scenes with Parker and McCarthy alone... and Glover really is a lot of fun.

Credits. Directed by Mark Cullingham; screenplay by Gavin Lambert, based on a novel by Rachel Ingalls; director of photography, Timothy Eaton; edited by Anita Brandt-Burgoyne; music by Michael Minard; production designer, Jan Pascale; produced by John Dolf and Victor Simpkins; released by Turner Pictures. Starring Corbin Bernsen (Carter Matthews), Amanda Pays (Jennifer Ashford), Eleanor Parker (Catharine Blake), Kevin McCarthy (Waverly Blake) and John Glover (Russell Blake).

Genre. Television.

Posted. 4 April 2006.

Weblink. <https://thestopbutton.com/2006/04/04/dead-on-the-money-1991/>.

Descriptors. Amanda Pays, Corbin Bernsen, Dead on the Money, Eleanor Parker, Gavin Lambert, John Glover, Kevin McCarthy, Timothy Eaton, Turner Pictures.

Home video availability. VHS, LaserDisc.



Detective Story

1951, William Wyler

★★★★★

Detective Story, the film, is William Wyler's "production" of Sidney Kingsley's play of the same title. Philip Yordan and Robert Wyler adapted the play. Wyler directed and produced the film. It is a stage adaptation and proud of it. The phrasing above is directly adapted from how the film opens and credits Wyler and Kingsley in the opening titles. One card: Wyler, Kingsley, *Detective Story*. Only it comes after the headlining cast title card: Kirk Douglas, Eleanor Parker, William Bendix. *Detective Story* is an extremely controlled viewing experience from the start.

Most of the film takes place inside the detective's office of a police station. There are a handful of locations around the station, but Wyler sticks with the detective's office. He and cinematographers Lee Garmes and John F. Seitz give the room some impossibly high ceilings—*Detective Story*'s audience isn't looking up at it, Wyler wants the audience to be able to examine the film, to examine its pieces.

The best scenes in the film involve Eleanor Parker. She's Kirk Douglas's wife. He's a puritanical cop, she's got a secret. Wyler opens the film with Bert Freed and Lee Grant—they provide a frame—she's a shoplifter who's got to go to night court. Freed's got to wait with her. Wyler makes the audience wait for Douglas. Then he makes them wait a little longer for Parker. He's already established the harsh realities of *Detective Story*; when Parker arrives, she's a ray of light.

Detective Story is very disillusioned, very noir, only Wyler doesn't shoot it noir. He's not making noir, he's staging a play. *Detective Story*'s two biggest problems are Robert Swink's editing, which can't keep up with the actors, and

Yordan and Wyler's generic cop talk. It might work on stage, with the audience looking up, but not when they're examining everything. Wyler invites the audience to examine the reality of *Detective Story* and he even appears to rush through the bad cop talk to far better sequences as though embarrassed.

There are a lot of characters, there's a lot going on. Wyler has to get through it; he's rarely subtle about the pace. There's one lovely transition sequence from day to night but otherwise, Wyler's just trying to get from one great scene for an actor to the next. It's a play, after all.

Parker gets the best stuff. She gets spun around and has to right herself. She has to dominate her scenes, which is incredibly difficult considering the whole movie is about Kirk Douglas's whirlwind. Sometimes he's still, but he's still a whirlwind. He has to be the hero the audience hates themselves for ever loving. Only it's not a last minute revelation, it's late second act plot development. Wyler and Douglas (and Parker) then have to take it all even further. *Detective Story*, as innocuous as it sounds, means to stomp out all the hopes and dreams it can.

Great performances all over. Freed, Grant, Michael Strong, Gerald Mohr, Joseph Wiseman—especially Joseph Wiseman, whose maniac career criminal ends up being Douglas's alter ego—George Macready, Cathy O'Donnell. Wyler makes sure every performance is good, but not every actor can get enough of a part. It's all Douglas and Parker's show, after all. Even Bendix, who's Douglas's far more humane partner and gets a subplot all his own, eventually has to move further aside.

Detective Story isn't a perfect film, but it's a most perfect staging of a play on film. Wyler's pacing is precise, his direction of the actors is flawless, his narrative distance is fantastic, ably assisted by his cinematographers and art directors and set decorator. Sure, Swink's editing is occasionally messy but it's all for the best of the actors. And they're what's essential. Parker, Douglas, Bendix, Horace McMahon (forgot about him earlier). They do startling work and Wyler knows it and wants to best showcase it. *Detective Story*'s an achievement for everyone involved.

Except Swink, of course.

Credits. Produced and directed by William Wyler; screenplay by Philip Yordan and Robert Wyler, based on the play by Sidney Kingsley; directors of photography, Lee Garmes and John F. Seitz; edited by Robert Swink; released by Paramount Pictures. Starring Kirk Douglas (Det. James McLeod), Eleanor Parker (Mary McLeod), William Bendix (Det. Lou Brody), Cathy O'Donnell (Susan Carmichael), George Macready

(Karl Schneider), Horace McMahon (Lt. Monaghan), Gladys George (Miss Hatch), Joseph Wiseman (Charley Gennini), Lee Grant (Shoplifter), Gerald Mohr (Tami Giacoppetti), Frank Faylen (Det. Gallagher), Craig Hill (Arthur Kindred), Michael Strong (Lewis Abbott), Luis Van Rooten (Joe Feinson), Bert Freed (Det. Dakis), Warner Anderson (Endicott Sims), Grandon Rhodes (Det. O'Brien), William 'Bill' Phillips (Det. Pat Callahan) and Russell Evans (Patrolman Barnes).

Genre. Classics.

Posted. 10 July 2016.

Weblink. <https://thetopbutton.com/2016/07/10/detective-story-1951/>.

Descriptors. Cathy O'Donnell, Detective Story, Eleanor Parker, Joseph Wiseman, Kirk Douglas, Lee Grant, Paramount Pictures, William Bendix, William Wyler.

Home video availability. DVD, streaming.



Escape Me Never **1947, Peter Godfrey**

Until now, I'd seen all of Eleanor Parker's readily available films (the ones on VHS, laserdisc, and DVD) except *Escape Me Never*. She made two films with Errol Flynn, playing the lead in the other, *Never Say Goodbye*, and a supporting role in *Escape Me Never*. Ida Lupino plays the lead female. Parker plays the other woman, who's married to Gig Young, who's playing Flynn's brother. It makes little sense and the whole film hinges on an agreement with the viewer never to question Flynn being irresistible.

The film is set in Venice in 1900. While the Venice sets, gondolas, canals and all, are quite nice, Lupino spends her first scene talking in 1940s slang. I've never seen Lupino in anything before and *Escape Me Never* certainly encourages me to be wary about seeing her in anything again. It's not just the slang—or the special lighting she gets—or even her accent appearing and disappearing... she's just really annoying (though her ludicrous costumes might contribute). Flynn is bad as well, somehow he's impossible to take seriously as a tortured composer. Gig Young is fine, but looks and acts like he belongs in a different movie—one actually set in 1900....

Eleanor Parker—in one of her most glamorous parts—is so completely lost I can't even mount a grand defense, which is fine, since it's the studio's fault. A few years before, Warner had given Parker the villainous role in *Of Human Bondage* (which she essayed brilliantly), but in *Escape Me Never*, her character's not responsible for her objectionable actions and so the character has no depth. It's probably Parker's shallowest role, but it fits the film's opinion of women. Women, it observes, are only of value for the reasons Flynn (and Flynn

alone) says... There's even a line about it. More than one, probably.

It's impossible to imagine anyone speaking the film's dialogue and conveying any sense of quality. Thames Williamson's script is occasionally so ludicrous, along with Lupino's shoddy performance, I was convinced the film was a farcical comedy. The scenes of Flynn, Lupino, and Young walking through the mountains, dressed in lederhosen certainly seems like it belongs in a farce. When the film moves its focus to a mountain resort (incredibly modern-looking for 1900 in Italy), the farce stops amusing and the viewer realizes it's supposed to be serious. *Escape Me Never* came at the end of the studio system—Flynn and Lupino were on their way down while Parker and Young were moving up—and it's a fine example of the system's failings. It's another one of those films I always had available on hand, but never watched for no good reason, only to watch it and wonder why I ever did, the original avoidance turning out to be fortuitous.

Credits. Directed by Peter Godfrey; screenplay by Thames Williamson, from the novel by Margaret Kennedy; director of photography, Sol Polito; edited by Clarence Kolster; music by Erich Wolfgang Korngold; produced by Henry Blanke; released by Warner Bros. Starring Errol Flynn (Sebastian Dubrok), Ida Lupino (Gemma Smith), Eleanor Parker (Fionella MacLean), Gig Young (Caryl Dubrok), Reginald Denny (Mr. MacLean), Isobel Elsom (Mrs. MacLean), Albert Bassermann (Prof. Heinrich), Ludwig Stössel (Mr. Steinach) and Milada Mladova (Natrova).

Genre. Classics.

Posted. 29 March 2006.

Weblink. <https://thestopbutton.com/2006/03/29/escape-me-never-1947/>.

Descriptors. Eleanor Parker, Erich Wolfgang Korngold, Errol Flynn, *Escape Me Never*, Gig Young, Ida Lupino, Isobel Elsom, Reginald Denny, Warner Bros.

Home video availability. DVD, streaming.



Eye of the Cat

1969, David Lowell Rich



Eye of the Cat is what happens when you have a screenplay entirely concerned with being a thriller (by Joseph Stefano) and a director, Rich, who is completely incapable of directing thrills. There's nothing else to the script, so the actors don't have anything to do, and pretty San Francisco scenery only goes so far. Especially given how poorly Rich presents it.

Michael Sarrazin plays a blue blood left without a fortune who spends his time as a lothario. Gayle Hunnicutt is the mysterious woman who, without much coaxing, convinces him to return to his still-wealthy aunt's home to get in her will and then murder her. Stefano's script might have originally been for television—Rich's direction is certainly more appropriate for it—but there are some frequent lurid details added.

Including Sarrazin's relationship with the aunt, played by Eleanor Parker, being deviant. Stefano's script goes out of its way to make everyone as unlikable as possible, whether Parker as a disturbed woman who manipulates Sarrazin (while rejecting a similar arrangement with Tim Henry, as his younger brother) or Sarrazin as a would-be murderer, while still making them vulnerable. Parker's got emphysema, Sarrazin has ailurophobia (a fear of cats); neither has enough of a character, though both try hard.

Hunnicutt's unlikable and mostly annoying. She's not exactly bad though. She just has a terrible character. Same goes for Henry.

Between Parker and Sarrazin—combined, they get the most screen time, but never enough—there could've been a good movie in *Eye of the Cat*. So long as

Stefano got a significant rewrite and there was a different director. With just a competent thriller director? *Cat* could've been a creepy modern Gothic.

Instead, Sarrazin and Parker have to keep it going—even through a particularly rough courtship montage through swinging sixties San Francisco—until the third act. Stefano's got such a strong third act, not even Rich's direction can screw it up. Though Stefano's denouement doesn't work, sending *Cat* on a lower note than it should.

Credits. Directed by David Lowell Rich; written by Joseph Stefano; directors of photography, Russell Metty and Ellsworth Fredericks; edited by J. Terry Williams; music by Lalo Schifrin; produced by Philip Hazelton, Bernard Schwartz and Leslie Stevens; released by Universal Pictures. Starring Michael Sarrazin (Wylie), Gayle Hunnicutt (Kassia Lancaster), Tim Henry (Luke), Laurence Naismith (Dr. Mills) and Eleanor Parker (Aunt Danny).

Genre. Horror.

Posted. 14 October 2015.

Weblink. <https://thestopbutton.com/2015/10/14/eye-cat-1969/>.

Descriptors. Bernard Schwartz, Eleanor Parker, Eye of the Cat, Gayle Hunnicutt, Lalo Schifrin, Laurence Naismith, Leslie Stevens, Michael Sarrazin, Universal Pictures.

Home video availability. Blu-ray.



The Great American Beauty Contest 1973, Robert Day

Trying to figure out where *The Great American Beauty Contest* stands on the women's lib movement is a headache. Actually, the whole thing is a little misogynist but not for the obvious reason—not because the titular contest's participants are being objectified (I doubt director Day could competently objectify anything or anyone), but because it presents all the women as shallow enough to want to be part of such a ruse.

Oh, Stanford Whitmore's script forgives a couple of them. Tracy Reed is all right because she's black and she's doing it to set an example. And Kathrine Baumann's okay too. She's just too dumb to be anything but sincere.

But Whitmore successfully demonizes Farrah Fawcett (and not for her terrible performance) and Susan Damante (she's atrocious too, actually worse than Fawcett) so well... I spent the big reveal hoping neither of them won. Whitmore's dialogue's terrible, Day's a bad director, but together they do manage to get some kind of investment from the viewer.

Maybe it's because there are some decent elements. Eleanor Parker's troubled contest organizer has a good arc. Robert Cummings is surprisingly sturdy as her sidekick. Best has to be Louis Jordan, who's utterly odious and gleefully so. Jordan and Parker make the film worthwhile. Well, as worthwhile as it gets.

Another big problem is Whitmore's artificial structure. He treats it like a two parter—Fawcett gets the first half's big story, Damante the second.

Aside from occasional good performances, *Beauty's* best as a strange artifact.

Credits. Directed by Robert Day; written by Stanford Whitmore; director of photography, James Crabe;

edited by Frank Capacchione, James Mitchell and Bruce Schoengarth; music by Kenneth Wannberg; produced by Everett Chambers; aired by the American Broadcasting Company. Starring Eleanor Parker (Peggy Lowery), Robert Cummings (Dan Carson), Louis Jourdan (Ralph Dupree), JoAnna Cameron (Gloria Rockwell), Farrah Fawcett (T.L. Dawson), Tracy Reed (Pamela Parker), Kathrine Baumann (Melinda Wilson), Susan Damante (Angelique) and Larry Wilcox (Joe Bunch).

Genre. Television.

Posted. 23 December 2013.

Weblink. <https://thestopbutton.com/2013/12/23/great-american-beauty-contest-1973/>.

Descriptors. ABC, Eleanor Parker, Farrah Fawcett, James Mitchell, JoAnna Cameron, Larry Wilcox, Louis Jourdan, Robert Cummings, The Great American Beauty Contest.

Home video availability. None.



Half a Death

1972, Leslie H. Martinson

Not Recommended

Half a Death gets off to a troubled start thanks to Tod Andrews. He's only in the episode (of "Ghost Story") for the first scene, but he's just awful. Watching Eleanor Parker act opposite him is painful. While Henry Slesar's script is no great shakes in the dialogue department, Parker still turns in a good performance. Andrews just flops.

Then Pamela Franklin—the protagonist—shows up and *Death* gets quite a bit better. Franklin and Parker are both excellent and they often make *Death* worthwhile. Slesar has a decent plot, if a bit contrived at times.

But the ending is so contrived, even with good supporting performances from Signe Hasso and, to a lesser extent, Stephen Brooks, it's hard to get involved. Slesar jumps forward too much in the timeline, making his long scenes the only effective ones.

The ending is summary.

Still, Franklin and Parker give outstanding, complex performances.

Credits. Directed by Leslie H. Martinson; teleplay by Harry Slesar; "Ghost Story" created by William Castle; director of photography, Emmett Bergholz; edited by John Sheets; music by Billy Goldenberg and Robert Prince; produced by Joel Rogosin; aired by the Columbia Broadcasting System. Starring Pamela Franklin (Christina Burgess), Stephen Brooks (Ethan), Andrew Duggan (Jeremy), Tod Andrews (Andrew Burgess), Signe Hasso (Mrs. Eliscu), Taylor Lacher (Charlie Eliscu) and Eleanor Parker (Paula Burgess).

Genre. Television.

Posted. 10 July 2012.

Weblink. <https://thestopbutton.com/2012/07/10/half-death-1972/>.

Descriptors. Andrew Duggan, CBS, Eleanor Parker, Half a Death, Pamela Franklin, Robert Prince,

Signe Hasso, Stephen Brooks, William Castle.

Home video availability. DVD.



Hans Brinker

1969, Robert Scheerer

Hans Brinker is clumsy and charmless. It plods through its runtime. Once it becomes clear Moose Charlap's songs aren't going to be getting any better and there's not going to be much expert iceskating on display, it plods even more. A lot of things would help—better writing, better acting, better photography. Unfortunately, *Hans* doesn't get any until it's too late and then it's only actors in the supporting cast.

The film starts with a flashback. Nineteenth century Dutch mason John Gregson has a fall. Then *Hans* fast forwards to Roberta Tovey entering an empty house and looking around wistfully. Then we finally get into the “present action” of Tovey's memories, ten years after the first scene. Screenwriter Bill Manhoff never identifies when or why Tovey returns to look around, but he doesn't do much as far as the teleplay goes so it's no surprise.

Robin Askwith plays the title role. He's a seventeen year-old Dutch boy with big dreams and no way to realize them; Gregson's fall resulted in some sort of brain damage and he hasn't been able to support the family. Oh, right: Gregson is Askwith's father. And Tovey's. She's Askwith's somewhat younger sister. The difference is never determined, but it's not too far—Askwith can still romance her rich friend, Sheila Whitmill, and *Hans* can do a wrong side of the tracks romantic subplot.

But a chaste one. *Hans* is for kids, after all. Kids with great patience.

Maybe the only good scene in the whole thing is Whitmill reading a romance novel scene to Tovey and another friend. It's strange and shows personality,

something *Hans* never does when it's chronicling Askwith's romance with Whitmill or his problems with the better-off boys around the village.

The songs ought to be a little funnier, but *Hans* has no sense of humor about itself. Not even when Askwith and his chums go to Amsterdam (so Askwith can recruit doctor Richard Basehart to operate on dad Gregson) and their innkeeper, Cyril Ritchard, does a cockney accent to show they're in Amsterdam, not the boonies.

Can Askwith convince Basehart to do the operation? Will the barely mentioned but apparently very important race for the silver skates ever arrive? Does Eleanor Parker—as Askwith and Tovey's mother—actually sing her two songs?

Parker, Basehart, and Gregson all try at various times throughout the film. Gregson's most successful, as Parker gets a lot worse scenes to do than he does. She also has to play opposite Askwith, who's a petulant jackass (regardless of family tragedy), and he's never good. Even when he's being selfless, he's somewhat unlikable. He's a snot.

His nemesis, rich kid Michael Wennink, on the other hand, is drivel. Julian Barnes is okay as the nice rich kid.

There are some lovely locations, some almost good sets of exteriors, when *Hans* might show some kind of personality. But director Scheerer avoids it, like he avoids pretty much everything. After the first big group song, Scheerer stops doing it big and instead relies on Edelgard Gielisch's bad editing to get the group numbers done. It doesn't seem like Askwith or Tovey sing. At least not often.

There are a number of cringeworthy songs, but "When He/She Speaks" is the clear cringe winner. It's all about how Askwith and Whitmill only love each other because they don't listen to each other. Instead they daydream about walks in the countryside and ignore the other's thoughts.

The big finale has big plot contrivances and some ostensible surprises. It doesn't go anywhere because director Scheerer and writer Manhoff don't wrap anything up. Plus, Tovey can't really be holding the knot because—even though *Hans* is her memories—she's only present for like a quarter of the film. The narrative disconnect isn't even annoying because at least it means there isn't more stuff for *Hans* to do wrong.

Tovey's fine. She's got a lousy part. Parker's solid, but Scheerer doesn't give

her much time on anything. Well, except the two songs, which either have Parker singing them or have them dubbed. They're both awkward songs. Cringey awkward, not funny awkward. Funny awkward would have at least passed the time. But *Hans* has no sense of humor.

It's joyless, which is a big problem for a kids musical, though it's pretty clear Askwith's *Hans* isn't capable of experiencing joy. So why should anyone else.

Credits. Directed by Robert Scheerer; teleplay by Bill Manhoff, based on the novel by Mary Mapes Dodge; director of photography, Günter Haase; edited by Edelgard Gielisch; songs and music by Moose Charlap; produced by Ted Kneeland; aired by the National Broadcasting Company. Starring Robin Askwith (Hans), Roberta Tovey (Gretel), Eleanor Parker (Dame Brinker), John Gregson (Mijnheer Brinker), Richard Basehart (Dr. Boekman), Sheila Whitmill (Annie), Julian Barnes (Peter), Michael Wennink (Carl), and Cyril Ritchard (Mijnheer Kleef).

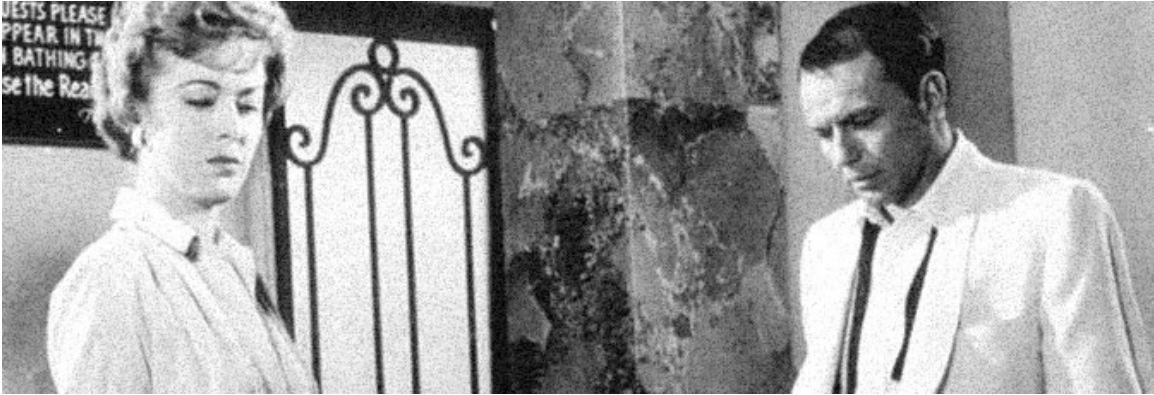
Genre. Television.

Posted. 22 September 2017.

Weblink. <https://thestopbutton.com/2017/09/22/hans-brinker-1969/>.

Descriptors. Cyril Ritchard, Eleanor Parker, Hans Brinker, John Gregson, Julian Barnes, NBC, Richard Basehart, Roberta Tovey, Robin Askwith.

Home video availability. DVD.



A Hole in the Head 1959, Frank Capra

★★½

The first hour of *A Hole in the Head* is slow going. It shouldn't be slow going, not with everything the film has going for it, but director Capra is real lazy. He's lazy with his composition, he's lazy with his actors, he's lazy with the pace. It's amazing how the film's pluses are able to turn things around in the second half.

The script's a very stagy adaptation of a play, with original playwright Arnold Schulman doing the adapting. Capra takes the easiest approach possible to everything in the first half of the film, which takes place almost entirely at lead Frank Sinatra's hotel. It's not a nice hotel, Sinatra's not a good hotelier, but there's something interesting about a little bit of a rundown hotel amid otherwise glamorous Miami Beach. Capra is indifferent to that possibility, unfortunately. Instead, he plops the camera down and shoots almost everything in medium shot, two characters in profile. It's beyond boring.

Sinatra's not just an unsuccessful businessman, he's a widower with an eleven year-old son (a likable Eddie Hodges) and a twenty-one year-old girlfriend (Carolyn Jones). Between Schulman's script and Capra's direction, none of the actors get much favor, but Jones easily gets the worst treatment. She's actually got a character and she does well. Schulman's just lazy. She lives in Sinatra's hotel, they're not discreet, yet Hodges never gets to acknowledge her. Not really. When the film finally does try, it cops out. Worse yet, it cops out with one of editor William Hornbeck's awful fades. Terrible editing in *Hole*. Not sure if it's Hornbeck or just Capra refusing to take the time to get solid coverage. I'd assume the latter.

But Sinatra's also unlikable in this first part of the film because it's about him

being a deadbeat dad. When redemption does arrive, in the film's deftest move, it doesn't come in the shapes of Edward G. Robinson and Thelma Ritter (Robinson's Sinatra's successful, if miserly, brother and Ritter's Robinson's very patient wife) or Eleanor Parker (as the widow who Robinson wants Sinatra to marry), it comes because Sinatra finally gets a character to play.

By not shooting his actors in close-up, except as comedic reaction shots, Capra never asks them to act. He never asks them to try. I guess Hodges does get close-ups, but it's so he can be likable, which is probably worse.

Sinatra and Parker have a very nice, very grown-up scene, with Sinatra leaving the hotel and going somewhere not shot in front of rear projection for once. *Hole* definitely shot on location in Miami, but not enough. At least not when none of the studio-shot inserts come close to matching. (Again, Capra's clearly checked out).

After that scene, the whole thing starts to turn around. Schulman and Capra take Sinatra (and the viewer) outside the hotel, the script gives Hodges something to do besides be cute, Ritter and Robinson aren't just playing for laughs anymore.

And, in the last half hour, *A Hole in the Head* gets quite good. The cast has a whole lot of goodwill banked from the first half, when Capra and the script clearly waste them, and it all pays off towards the end. The actors save *A Hole in the Head*. They save it from Schulman's unsteady script, from Capra's unimaginative visualizing of said script, from Hornbeck's jarring cuts. They even save it from the awful Nelson Riddle music.

Capra asks everyone to do movie star acting in a story needing a far more muted approach. Sinatra, Parker, Ritter, Robinson. They're all good enough actors to know what their characters need. Would better direction improve the film? Definitely. But it does all right without it.

Credits. Produced and directed by Frank Capra; screenplay by Arnold Schulman, based on his play; director of photography, William H. Daniels; edited by William Hornbeck; music by Nelson Riddle; released by United Artists. Starring Frank Sinatra (Tony Manetta), Eddie Hodges (Ally Manetta), Carolyn Jones (Shirl), Thelma Ritter (Sophie Manetta), Edward G. Robinson (Mario Manetta), Keenan Wynn (Jerry Marks) and Eleanor Parker (Mrs. Eloise Rogers).

Genre. Comedy.

Posted. 10 December 2015.

Weblink. <https://thestopbutton.com/2015/12/10/hole-head-1959/>.

Descriptors. A Hole in the Head, Carolyn Jones, Edward G. Robinson, Eleanor Parker, Frank Capra,

Frank Sinatra, Keenan Wynn, Thelma Ritter, United Artists.

Home video availability. DVD, Blu-ray, streaming.



Home for the Holidays

1972, John Llewellyn Moxey



Director Moxey has—there’s no better word for it—a compulsion for zooming. He absolutely loves it. I imagine it saved the time and money needed for additional set-ups—and I think short zooms from character to character were a 1970s TV movie standard—but it looks just terrible. It kills some of the scenes in *Home for the Holidays*; otherwise perfectly fine, sometimes eerie scenes, ruined by Moxey and his zooming camera. After the first twenty or thirty minutes, it almost gets funny, how bad a technique he’s employing. When he turns in one particularly taut sequence—Sally Field being chased through the forest by the murderer—it’s a surprise he can do such good work. It’s a great chase scene, full of suspense... with only the commercial break to eventually impair it.

Moxey does have considerable talent, however. He frames shots rather well—when he’s not zooming—and the way he moves actors around in a static shot is fantastic. His close-ups aren’t particularly special, but the medium shots where he can fit four actors into the frame are good. *Home for the Holidays*, though written, produced and directed by men, is a woman’s picture. The five principals are women, with Walter Brennan in a glorified cameo as father to Field, Jill Haworth, Jessica Walter and Eleanor Parker—Julie Harris plays his new wife, who the women’s mother killed herself over. Brennan’s got little to do in a poorly written role—the Brennan voice doesn’t work with the character. The only other male actor is John Fink, as Field’s erstwhile romantic interest (and, for one possible moment—and for more interestingly—Parker’s). Fink turns in a standard TV movie performance, which doesn’t cut it in the company of the female actors.

The weakest performance is Haworth. She has one okay scene and a lot of bad ones. Joseph Stefano's script moves quickly, especially when establishing the characters, and he rushes a tad much with Haworth's character development. But it isn't really Stefano's fault—just like Moxey—he's not really responsible for most of the film's success. Walter doesn't have much more character, but she's excellent—even when she's delivering this strange Shakespearian monologue. Parker's solid, with a lot more to do at the beginning than the end, when *Home for the Holiday's* becomes a Sally Field vehicle. It's hard to imagine what Field's getting her master's degree in, but that disbelief aside, she actually does pretty well considering she's not really a match for Parker, Walters or Julie Harris. Harris has the toughest performance—she's got to be the hated step-mother, the suspect; Harris manages beautifully, creating a character who the viewer hopes isn't guilty, even though all evidence points to it.

The end, the unveiling, falls apart. It's paced well, though, with the revelation coming before the climax, allowing for some more solid acting and decent scenes. Moxey ends it on one of his zooms, but it's got the music from George Aliceson Tipton going—and the music is excellent—so it gets a pass.

Credits. Directed by John Llewellyn Moxey; written by Joseph Stefano; director of photography, Leonard J. South; edited by Allan Jacobs; music by George Aliceson Tipton; produced by Paul Junger Witt; released by the American Broadcasting Company. Starring Jessica Walter (Frederica Morgan), Sally Field (Christine Morgan), Jill Haworth (Joanna Morgan), Julie Harris (Elizabeth Hall Morgan), Eleanor Parker (Alex Morgan), Walter Brennan (Benjamin Morgan), John Fink (Doctor Ted Lindsay) and Med Flory (Sheriff Nolan).

Genre. Television.

Posted. 23 February 2009.

Weblink. <https://thestopbutton.com/2009/02/23/home-for-holidays-1972/>.

Descriptors. ABC, Eleanor Parker, Home for the Holidays, Jessica Walter, Jill Haworth, Julie Harris, Med Flory, Sally Field, Walter Brennan.

Home video availability. DVD.



Home from the Hill

1960, Vincente Minnelli



Whenever I see a list of “classic” films, I rarely see any of the complex character pieces Hollywood produced in the 1950s and 1960s. They produced quite a few, but none ever get much credit. Harriet Frank Jr. and Irving Ravetch wrote a few of them, but the Paul Newman films are—as Paul Newman films—better known than *Home from the Hill*. I first saw *Hill* back when I was watching Eleanor Parker films and I’ve probably seen it once since then, just to watch the laserdisc. Like many films I saw seven years ago, I don’t remember a lot about it. The best way to remember a lot about a film is to write about it for a class or something (I doubt these posts will ingrain themselves like actual research did for *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town*). For example, I forgot how fast *Home from the Hill* moves along. Thirty-seven minutes passes with the snap of the fingers. It’s a longer film too, 150 minutes, and it’s either got a ten minutes first act or a fifty-five minute one. I’d have to be graded on it to make a judgement.

Home from the Hill features a quintessential Robert Mitchum performance. He’s a Texan land baron who hunts, drinks and philanders. He’s got a wife—Parker—and son, George Hamilton, he has nothing to do with and an illegitimate son, George Peppard, he’s got everything to do with. Each of these characters has an incredibly complex relationship with one another and—for a film with a lot of sweeping camerawork—Minnelli is incredibly gentle with the way he explores the relationships. The editing of the film, the physical cutting between shot to shot, is imperfect, but there are these wonderful moments in the film when Minnelli just lets big things go little. Big things go unsaid. It’s lovely. The film’s extreme beauty in these evolving character relationships, the way they change and their changing value for the audience. It’s some of the finest family work

ever done in film (seeing it makes me wonder if Spielberg has seen it, based on his work in *Jaws*—P.T. Anderson might not have seen it, but he’s seen *Jaws* I’m sure). It’s a different type of family work than something like *Ordinary People*, almost an entirely subset. In many ways, the modern Japanese family drama handles camerawork in the same ways.

The acting is excellent. It’s some of Mitchum’s best work and Parker’s great, but it’s the two Georges who surprised me the first time I saw it and surprised me again today. Besides looking identical to a young Anthony Perkins, Hamilton is great. Nuanced, subtle, had a lot of difficult stuff to do. He’s become a joke. So has Peppard. He’s remembered for “The A-Team,” but his performance in *Home from the Hill* is indicative of a “star quality” the 1960s rarely produced. Peppard’s performance is even more impressive. Mercury Theater member Everett Sloane has a small role—he’s unrecognizable, or at least was to me—and even he has a complex relationship with the characters. Frank and Ravetch adapted a novel, so I’m not sure how much of the structuring was theirs and how much was from the source (after finding out the structure of *The Killing* is from the novel, no one gets undue credit), but the film’s laid out brilliantly. Again, it’s worth a graded essay, but this post will have to do.

Warner Bros. is rumored to have the film in the works for DVD—I watched my LaserDisc, which is actually rotting, my first experience with that malady—hopefully by the end of this year.

Credits. Directed by Vincente Minnelli; screenplay by Harriet Frank Jr. and Irving Ravetch, based on the novel by William Humphrey; director of photography, Milton R. Krasner; edited by Harold F. Kress; music by Bronislau Kaper; produced by Edmund Grainger and Sol C. Siegel; released by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. Starring Robert Mitchum (Capt. Wade Hunnicutt), Eleanor Parker (Hannah Hunnicutt), George Peppard (Rafe Copley), George Hamilton (Theron Hunnicutt), Everett Sloane (Albert Halstead), Luana Patten (Libby Halstead), Anne Seymour (Sarah Halstead), Constance Ford (Opal Bixby), Ken Renard (Chauncey) and Ray Teal (Dr. Reuben Carson).

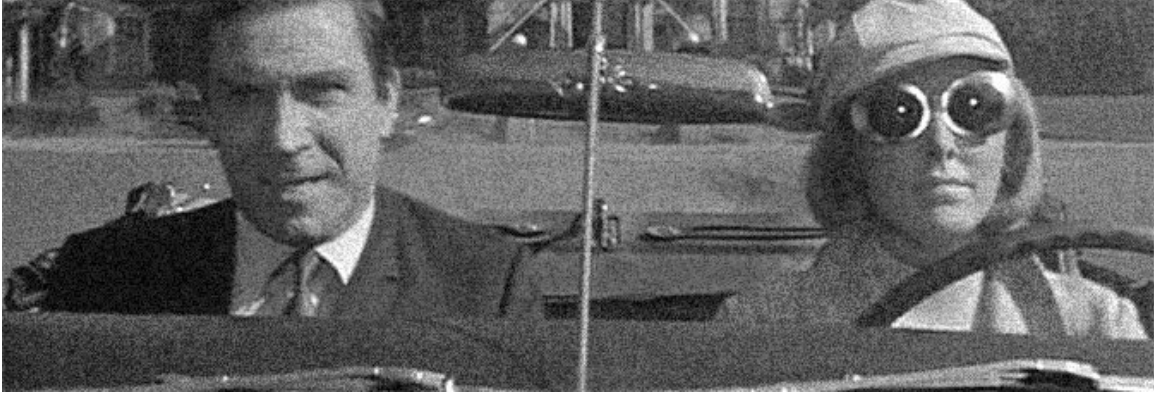
Genre. Drama.

Posted. 27 February 2006.

Weblink. <https://thestopbutton.com/2006/02/27/home-from-the-hill-1960/>.

Descriptors. Constance Ford, Eleanor Parker, George Hamilton, George Peppard, Home from the Hill, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, Ray Teal, Robert Mitchum, Vincente Minnelli.

Home video availability. DVD, Blu-ray, streaming.



How to Steal the World 1968, Sutton Roley



It takes a long seventy-five minutes to get there, but *How to Steal the World* does have some good moments in its finale. *World* is a theatrical release of a “Man from U.N.C.L.E.” television two-parter. It leads to an often boring ninety minutes, which improves in the second half just for momentum’s sake, leading up to the finale’s potential pay-offs. Director Roley misses all that potential as he’s an astoundingly disinterested director. Some of the framing and composition issues are just because it’s for at most a twenty-three-inch television set, but a lot of it’s just Roley. He doesn’t care.

The film’s opening credits are over an action sequence. Peter Mark Richman’s bad guy escapes from Robert Vaughan and David McCallum. Richman escapes with Eleanor Parker’s help, something Vaughan and McCallum don’t notice. If Vaughan and McCallum are anything, they aren’t observant. They also don’t get much to do in *World*, supporting cast intrigue of mad scientist plotting and T.H.R.U.S.H. office sex dominates the first half of *World*.

Parker is cuckolding runaway U.N.C.L.E. agent Barry Sullivan with T.H.R.U.S.H. up-and-comer Richman. While everyone’s looking for Sullivan and the world’s greatest minds, Parker and Richman are hanging out at his office. They take turns lounging on the sofa after they have to close the blinds because they’re too rowdy. The best part is Parker’s wardrobe changes almost every scene during the sequence, implying it takes place over some time. Meaning she just spends her time hanging out with her global villain boytoy. It’s fun.

Meanwhile, Sullivan is doing his unit the seven thing (there are seven of these

great minds). Sullivan's kind of flimsy. He gets this second half subplot where he bickers a lot with his head of security, Leslie Nielsen. It should be better, given where writer Norman Hudis takes it in the end, but it's not. Maybe it's an issue related to the TV-to-movie conversion, since it's not all Soley's responsibility. Hudis's script isn't paced well in the first half.

Anyway, Albert Paulsen is better as the main mad scientist collaborator. He doesn't get anything to do, but he finally gets to have a great moment where he and Sullivan slap each other's hands in the finale. He's also the way Hudis throws in the young lovers subplot. Inger Stratton is Paulsen's daughter, Tony Bill is Dan O'Herlihy's. O'Herlihy is one of the kidnapped scientists; Bill teams up with McCallum to get him back. Maybe the scene of Bill pointing a gun at McCallum and telling the secret agent he's got a new partner played better on TV.

O'Herlihy is fine. Richman and Parker get to be kind of fun. Parker gets a little more to do because she's grieving, confused wife—Vaughan and McCallum are investigating Sullivan's disappearance; they, of course, miss all her suspicious behaviors. Stratton's not good. Bill's bad. Nielsen's lacking. He has a handful of all right moments, but it doesn't pay off. More because of Roley's direction. He's not just humorless, he's anti-smile.

And he misses this amazing finish for Richman and Parker's affair. Hudis seems to get it. Maybe not. TV two-parters aren't features, after all.

The finale almost elevates *World*. It seems like it should, with opportunity after opportunity. It just never happens. It's fortunate. A lot of the cast deserves better.

Credits. Directed by Sutton Roley; teleplay by Norman Hudis, "The Man From U.N.C.L.E." developed by Sam Rolfe; director of photography, Robert B. Hauser; edited by Joseph Dervin and Harry V. Knapp; music by Richard Shores; produced by Anthony Spinner; released by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. Starring Robert Vaughn (Napoleon Solo), David McCallum (Ilya Kuryakin), Barry Sullivan (Dr. Robert Kingsley), Eleanor Parker (Margitta Kingsley), Peter Mark Richman (Mr. Webb), Leslie Nielsen (Gen. Maximilian Harmon), Dan O'Herlihy (Prof. David Garrow), Tony Bill (Steven Garrow), Albert Paulsen (Dr. Kurt Erikson), Inger Stratton (Anna Erikson), and Leo G. Carroll (Alexander Waverly).

Genre. Television.

Posted. 8 September 2017.

Weblink. <https://thestopbutton.com/2017/09/08/seven-wonders-world-affair-1968/>.

Descriptors. Barry Sullivan, Dan O'Herlihy, David McCallum, Eleanor Parker, How to Steal the World, Leo G. Carroll, Leslie Nielsen, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, Robert Vaughn.

Home video availability. DVD, streaming.



Interrupted Melody

1955, Curtis Bernhardt

★★★★

Interrupted Melody is an interesting example of economic storytelling. The film covers about ten years, has a number of strong character relationships, but moves gently through all of it. It's got moments where there isn't any dialogue, just the look between characters, it's got a great love story—and, even better, a great struggling marriage. Director Bernhardt deserves a lot of the credit—for example, he knows just how long to let these scenes go and the first date between Eleanor Parker and Glenn Ford does better in five minutes what most films—most good films—spend twenty doing. It's not just Bernhardt though. *Interrupted Melody* was co-written by Sonya Levien, who also worked on *The Cowboy and the Lady* and it had similarly perfect pacing.

Most of *Interrupted Melody* is a showcase for its actors, whether it's Parker or Ford or even a young (and good-looking) Roger Moore. The film's structure varies in focus—for instance, there's a large part where Ford is the protagonist over Parker—but manages the transitions back and forth beautifully. So beautifully, in fact, I don't even recall the first transition. The second, later one, I still do....

Besides being Parker's best performance (probably, at least in the lead), *Interrupted Melody* has a great Glenn Ford performance. Ford never gets the proper respect—search for him on IMDb and the first title to come up is *Superman*, but he's really good, especially in this, mid-1950s period of his career. *Melody*'s not out on DVD, but it does run occasionally on TCM. TCM has their wonderful database, which allows you to vote for films for Warner Bros. to release on DVD. Like [Interrupted Melody](#), for example.

Credits. Directed by Curtis Bernhardt; written by William Ludwig and Sonya Levien; directors of photography, Joseph Ruttenberg and Paul Vogel; edited by John D. Dunning; produced by Jack Cummings; released by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. Starring Glenn Ford (Dr. Thomas King), Eleanor Parker (Marjorie Lawrence), Roger Moore (Cyril Lawrence), Cecil Kellaway (Bill Lawrence), Peter Leeds (Dr. Ed Ryson), Evelyn Ellis (Clara), Walter Baldwin (Jim Owens), Ann Codee (Madame Gilly), Leopold Sachse (Himself) and Stephen Bekassy (Count Claude des Vignaux).

Genre. Classics.

Posted. 9 February 2006.

Weblink. <https://thestopbutton.com/2006/02/09/interrupted-melody-1955/>.

Descriptors. Cecil Kellaway, Eleanor Parker, Glenn Ford, Interrupted Melody, Jack Cummings, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, Paul Vogel, Peter Leeds, Roger Moore.

Home video availability. DVD, streaming.



The King and Four Queens

1956, Raoul Walsh

★★½

Clark Gable is an exceptional movie star. I'm not sure how good of an actor he is—his performance in *The King and Four Queens* is not, for instance, nuanced and textured, but he carries it from the first minute. Movie stars today—the ones who can act—rarely carry their “fluff” roles (I'm thinking of Nicolas Cage in particular). Gable does such a good job carrying the film, entertaining the audience, it's very easy to overlook all the problems with *King and Four Queens*.

He's not alone... both Eleanor Parker and Jo Van Fleet are great too. Van Fleet is given a fuller character to work with but Parker and Gable's scenes are nice too. Parker holds up against him in these scenes, which are quite good. The film's pacing is completely off—it's a small story (and a short film, eighty-two minutes)—mostly because the other three actresses are light. None of them, except maybe Jean Willes, are bad, they just don't hold up against Gable and Van Fleet. Even so, some of those scenes are very entertaining. On the scene-level, *The King and Four Queens* has a great script... it's just in the whole package, there are significant pacing problems.

I know a little about the making of the film—there were significant cut scenes and it's the only production from Gable's company, Gabco. Even with the unsatisfying conclusion, it's an enjoyable experience. I haven't seen a post-war Gable film since the last time I saw this one (maybe six years ago) and it's incredible how well he carries the film. The title—probably giving away his role as producer—refers to MGM's title for Gable in the 1930s, “The King of Hollywood.”

The film comes on TCM every once in a while in a watchable, but visibly unrestored print. This print's widescreen, however, and I can't imagine seeing it pan and scan (though I once did). Raoul Walsh likes to move his camera and hold his shots. He's another of the film's pleasant surprises.

Credits. Directed by Raoul Walsh; screenplay by Margaret Fitts and Richard Alan Simmons, based on a story by Fitts; director of photography, Lucien Ballard; edited by Howard Bretherton; music by Alex North; production designer, Wiard Ihnen; produced by David Hempstead; released by United Artists. Starring Clark Gable (Dan Kehoe), Eleanor Parker (Sabina McDade), Jean Willes (Ruby McDade), Barbara Nichols (Birdie McDade), Sara Shane (Oralie McDade), Roy Roberts (Sheriff Tom Larrabee), Arthur Shields (Padre), Jay C. Flippen (Bartender) and Jo Van Fleet (Ma McDade).

Genre. Classics.

Posted. 18 January 2006.

Weblink. <https://thestopbutton.com/2006/01/18/the-king-and-four-queens-1956/>.

Descriptors. Barbara Nichols, Clark Gable, Eleanor Parker, Jay C. Flippen, Jean Willes, Jo Van Fleet, Raoul Walsh, The King and Four Queens, United Artists.

Home video availability. DVD, Blu-ray.



Knight's Gambit

1964, Walter Grauman

Recommended

Knight's Gambit plays a little like a serious, American James Bond variation. Roger Smith is a former CIA agent—he inherited hundreds of millions and quit—out to seduce Eleanor Parker for information. Parker is a disgraced politician's secretary; they're living in Spain, in exile.

The spy stuff is terrible. Smith's boss—Murray Matheson—wears around long shorts and wears an eye patch. Smith is atrocious in the scenes with Matheson. The big villain is a mobster too. The script never explains that angle enough.

Parker's outstanding as a woman trapped and Smith does show his conflict once he takes to her. Ted de Corsia's fine as the bad guy and Chester Morris's good as Parker's boss.

Lorenzo Semple Jr. and Halsted Welles write Parker some excellent dialogue.

Good John Williams music too.

Grauman's direction is weak, but nothing could fix the bad spy action finish.

Still, Parker sells it.

Credits. Directed by Walter Grauman; teleplay by Lorenzo Semple Jr. and Halsted Welles, based on a story by Robert Brees; "Kraft Suspense Theatre" sponsored by Kraft Foods; director of photography, Walter Strenge; edited by Carl Pingitore; music by John Williams; produced by Brees; aired by the National Broadcasting System. Starring Eleanor Parker (Dorian Smith), Roger Smith (Anthony Griswold Knight), Chester Morris (Blaine Davis), Murray Matheson (Douglas Henderson), H.M. Wynant (Escobar), Erika Peters (Bijou), Vito Scotti (Tout), Louis Mercier (Mr. Salonnis) and Ted de Corsia (Mike Serra).

Genre. Television.

Posted. 19 September 2013.

Weblink. <https://thestopbutton.com/2013/09/19/knights-gambit-1964/>.

Descriptors. Chester Morris, Eleanor Parker, John Williams, Knight's Gambit, Murray Matheson, NBC, Roger Smith, Ted de Corsia, Vito Scotti.

Home video availability. None.



The Last Ride

1944, D. Ross Lederman



I'm a fan of Warner Bros.'s old hour-long b-movies, so I found *The Last Ride* particularly distressing. It's not poorly directed—Lederman even has one or two really good shots—and the writing, at least scenically, isn't bad. There are some funny moments and the teaser is excellent. It all falls apart pretty quickly, however (it is only fifty-six minutes). The film's continuity editing is real sloppy, like they shot scenes based on one script, didn't shoot the rest of the scenes, and let everything sort of clash. The first time, it's annoying, but by the second... it's a significant strike against the film.

There's also the problem with the script in terms of the characters' stupidity. They're real dumb, missing the most obvious things. Makes it real hard to care about them. There's also the case of the disappearing character—Eleanor Parker disappears after two scenes, Mary Gordon is gone by the twenty minute mark (she has the really good comedic scene)—and these aren't characters the movie, given how the story develops, can do without. They're needed to react and to interact and they're gone (probably off shooting other Warner Bros. pictures, but whatever). Richard Travis manages to hold the film up on his own longer than I thought one person could, but even he buckles under the poor handling of the script's developments.

Besides Travis (and Tod Andrews in a small role), most of the performances are wobbly. Cy Kendall is good in parts, too much in others. Same with Charles Lang. Parker's barely in it, Gordon's expositional introduction of her doing more to establish the character than Parker has time to do. The opening setup is better acted than the rest of the film, by actors who don't stick around long, only

because their story is more interesting—if a lot more sensational—than what follows.

My favorite part is the end, when there are all these leftover lines from when *The Last Ride* was going to run ninety minutes. The way it ends, it's like at least fifteen was lopped off... it just stops at the earliest convenient point.

Credits. Directed by D. Ross Lederman; written by Raymond L. Schrock; director of photography, James Van Trees; edited by Harold McLernon; music by William Lava; released by Warner Bros. Starring Richard Travis (Detective Lt. Pat Harrigan), Charles Lang (Mike Harrigan), Eleanor Parker (Kitty Kelly), Jack La Rue (Joe Genna), Cy Kendall (Capt. Butler), Wade Boteler (Police Chief Delaney), Mary Gordon (Mrs. Mary Kelly), Harry Lewis (Harry Bronson) and Tod Andrews (Fritz Hummel).

Genre. Classics.

Posted. 21 November 2007.

Weblink. <https://thestopbutton.com/2007/11/21/the-last-ride-1944/>.

Descriptors. Charles Lang, Eleanor Parker, Harry Lewis, Jack La Rue, Mary Gordon, Richard Travis, The Last Ride, Tod Andrews, Warner Bros.

Home video availability. DVD.



Lizzie

1957, Hugo Haas



Lizzie is about lead Eleanor Parker's struggle with multiple personality disorder. More accurately perhaps, *Lizzie* is about Parker's multiple personality disorder. As a protagonist, Parker disappears fairly quickly into the film's eighty minute runtime. She doesn't even get to open the film; it introduces her through other characters' expository conversation.

Screenwriter Mel Dinelli, quite unfortunately, often relies on expository conversation.

When Parker is the lead, however, *Lizzie* is in pretty good shape. Even though Parker's alternate personalities are a little shallow as far as characterization goes, Parker's performance is strong. Even she can't do anything with the hallucination sequences though. *Lizzie* is a technical mess. Director Haas (who gives himself a supporting acting role, which I'll get to in a bit) has three directorial modes. Some of *Lizzie*, when the film is just watching Parker act, feels experimental and edgy. Unfortunately, it contrasts with Haas's inept handling of regular sequences. *Lizzie* doesn't have much of a budget and the sets are bad, something Haas and cinematographer Paul Ivano aggravate. But then Haas and Ivano also go for foreboding mood, with the inept assistance of composer Leith Stevens, and *Lizzie* feels even more uneven.

As Parker's psychiatrist, Richard Boone doesn't have much to do but he's sincere in the performance. There's even a scene where Parker tries to draw him out a little, allow him room for personality and Boone demurs. Like I said before, Dinelli's script is a mess.

As Parker's suffering aunt, Joan Blondell is good. She starts out as a shrill harpy, but eventually Blondell is able to do something with the part. Haas, as an actor, is her mooning sidekick.

Lizzie has some great acting from Parker, who unfortunately proves no matter how fine a performance, when something is dramatically inert, there's no way to get it moving.

Credits. Directed by Hugo Haas; screenplay by Mel Dinelli, based on a novel by Shirley Jackson; director of photography, Paul Ivano; edited by Leon Barsha; music by Leith Stevens; produced by Jerry Bresler; released by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. Starring Eleanor Parker (Elizabeth Richmond), Richard Boone (Dr. Neal Wright), Joan Blondell (Aunt Morgan), Hugo Haas (Walter Brenner), Ric Roman (Johnny Valenzo), Marion Ross (Ruth Seaton) and Johnny Mathis (Piano Singer).

Genre. Drama.

Posted. 15 March 2016.

Weblink. <https://thestopbutton.com/2016/03/15/lizzie-1957/>.

Descriptors. Eleanor Parker, Hugo Haas, Joan Blondell, Johnny Mathis, Lizzie, Marion Ross, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, Richard Boone, Shirley Jackson.

Home video availability. DVD.



Madame X

1981, Robert Ellis Miller

Madame X never has good pacing. The movie starts with Tuesday Weld on trial, in old age makeup. She refuses to identify herself, hence the title, and won't even assist her lawyer, Martina Deignan, in her own defense. Weld's completely passive in the scene. Robert Hooks's prosecuting attorney closing arguments dominate the scene, setting a problematic tone for the next hundred or so minutes.

Weld is the "star" of *Madame X*, and while she's the subject of the movie, writer Edward Anhalt and director Miller never let her be its protagonist. Not for long anyway; not in the second half, when it matters. Instead, the supporting cast runs the movie. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't. What's worse is how good Weld is during most of the latter type. After a too long setup, *Madame X* turns into a series of vignettes with different guest stars. Weld doesn't get much to do in these scenes, except be a little bit more of a fallen woman. Without material or even the movie's attention, she's great. While the script might not try to build a character, Weld's working on it.

And then in the narratively defective third act, when Anhalt's script does give Weld some agency again, *Madame X* backtracks some of the work she's done and gives her a shallow melodramatic finish. *Madame X* never wants to be anything but affecting melodrama; it's one tragedy after another. And it's not about them not adding up into anything, it's about that anything not getting the time it needs.

The script has a real problem emphasizing the right character. Ellis's direction doesn't help. Some of the problems might just be the nature of TV movies, like

defense attorney Deignan not getting enough time. When it seems like she might get some development, the third act surprise takes it away from her. That third act surprise disappoints too. There's just no time for it—*Madame X* needed at least another ten minutes, maybe twenty.

So, while Weld's the lead and she's good at the beginning, problematic in the middle, great in the second half, persevering at the finish, *Madame X* is about the supporting cast. Weld might be in the foreground, but all the focus is on the background. Sometimes literally. Woody Omens's photography is competent and effective; the content's sometimes a mess but Omens shoots it fine. *Madame X* travels the world, but was probably all shot around L.A.; Omens hides it as well as he can.

Anyway. The supporting cast. Best is Jeremy Brett. He's second-billed, which initially suggests he's going to have a substantial presence. He doesn't. But he's great when he's in the film. Then maybe Len Cariou. But the script fails him. So maybe Eleanor Parker. Script fails her too, but in different ways than Cariou. Parker's one-note in her scenes with Weld. She's a good mean matriarch but in her scenes with other people, she's got a lot more texture. It's the script. Anhalt's script does no one any favors during dramatic sequences. Well, maybe Brett.

Then there's Jerry Stiller. He's not good, but he's fine.

Granville Van Dusen is too slight. Even when he tries, he's too slight. The script's not good to him either. Robin Strand, billed like he's going to have a real part, has a couple scenes. He's not good. He's likable, sort of, but he's not good. The script even goes out of its way to make him sort of likable, which it rarely does for anyone.

Until the third act, *Madame X* seems like it's going to be able to coast on Weld's performance. It gets long once Weld gets demoted in agency—it's long at the start because Van Dusen's so boring and the script won't get moving—but it gets real long once Weld stops leading it. Her performance develops to the point *Madame X*'s questionable attempts at soap opera melodrama don't matter as much as what Weld's going to do with them. Will it add up?

No. It won't.

Credits. Directed by Robert Ellis Miller; teleplay by Edward Anhalt, based on the play by Alexandre Bisson and the screenplay by Jean Holloway; director of photography, Woody Omens; edited by Skip Lusk; music by Angela Morley; produced by Paula Levenback and Wendy Riche; aired by the National Broadcasting Company. Starring Tuesday Weld (Holly Richardson), Granville Van Dusen (Clay Richardson), Eleanor Parker (Katherine Richardson), Len Cariou (John Abbott), Jeremy Brett (Dr. Terrence

Keith), Robin Strand (Willy Dwyer), Jerry Stiller (Burt Orland), Martina Deignan (Elizabeth Reeves), and Robert Hooks (Dist. Atty. Roerich).

Genre. Television.

Posted. 29 September 2017.

Weblink. <https://thestopbutton.com/2017/09/29/madame-10-1981/>.

Descriptors. Eleanor Parker, Jeremy Brett, Jerry Stiller, Len Cariou, Madame X, NBC, Robert Hooks, Robin Strand, Tuesday Weld.

Home video availability. None.



Madison Avenue

1962, H. Bruce Humberstone

★½

Madison Avenue somehow manages to be anorexic but packed. It only runs ninety minutes and takes place over a few years. There's no makeup—which is probably good since Dana Andrews, Eleanor Parker and Jeanne Crain are all playing at least ten years younger than their ages.

Director Humberstone doesn't do much in the way of establishing shots—I think there's one real one. Most of the exteriors are obviously on the backlot (even the real one is probably somewhere on the studio lot). He does have some decent transitions from interior to interior, but he never visually acknowledges all of the time progressions.

And there's no real conflict. Andrews is an ad man who loses his job and tells his ex-boss (an extremely amused Howard St. John) he's going to come get his accounts. To do so, Andrews has to team with Parker. The problem with *Avenue* is its actors are good, its script has some good scenes, but there's no depth to it. Norman Corwin can write decent back and forth banter, just not a real conversation.

Parker's got an unfortunate arc, but her performance is fine. She's really good at the beginning. Andrews is appealing and doesn't look fifty-four. He looks about forty-five, but he's probably supposed to be playing thirty-one. Crain looks more contemptuous of her material than the other leads; she does okay.

Nice supporting turn from Kathleen Freeman as Andrews's secretary.

Avenue's a studio picture fifteen years too late.

Credits. Produced and directed by H. Bruce Humberstone; screenplay by Norman Corwin, based on a

novel by Jeremy Kirk; director of photography, Charles G. Clarke; edited by Betty Steinberg; music by Harry Sukman; released by 20th Century Fox. Starring Dana Andrews (Clint Lorimer), Eleanor Parker (Anne Tremaine), Jeanne Crain (Peggy Shannon), Eddie Albert (Harvey Holt Ames), Howard St. John (J.D. Jocelyn), Henry Daniell (Stipe), Kathleen Freeman (Miss Thelma Haley), David White (Brock) and Betti Andrews (Katie Olsen).

Genre. Drama.

Posted. 23 March 2014.

Weblink. <https://thestopbutton.com/2014/03/23/madison-avenue-1962/>.

Descriptors. 20th Century Fox, Dana Andrews, David White, Eddie Albert, Eleanor Parker, Henry Daniell, Jeanne Crain, Kathleen Freeman, Madison Avenue.

Home video availability. DVD (pan and scan).



The Man with the Golden Arm

1955, Otto Preminger



There are a few problems with *The Man with the Golden Arm*. It's hard to think of the film actually having any defects, since it's such a brilliantly made motion picture. It was one of the first Preminger films I saw and was I ever surprised when they all weren't so beautifully put together. The film's shot on this magnificent set—it's a block and a quarter maybe (shades of *Eyes Wide Shut* in terms of the control Preminger could get from it)—and Preminger's camera floats around it; it's impossible to think the camera's on a pre-laid track. Then there's the music—Elmer Bernstein's score is always fantastic, always right on, whether he's dealing with addiction, human regard or suspense. Or the script—there's amazing dialogue throughout the entire film.

I think this viewing must have been my third of the film and, again, I had the sensation at the open—it had to be better than I remembered, just look at that opening shot. But as the running time passes, the problems become clear. It's unbelievable Frank Sinatra's character would marry Eleanor Parker's because he crippled her in a car accident. It's not unbelievable he would have been torn up about it, but the film directly says he only married her because he felt responsible. The character doesn't play that way—not with him becoming a heroin addict and flushing everything but that responsibility away. It could play—he's escaping into the heroin—but the script doesn't set it up. It's almost implied in some dialogue (the film opens after Sinatra's clean following six months of rehab); it's not enough.

Second big problem—Kim Novak's a together young woman who can't find a better job than being a friendly, paid patron at a burlesque parlor. Or whatever

the women who have drinks with and smile at the men are called. There's got to be a word for it. It simply does not work. She's too obviously a function, too obviously a cog in the eventual dramatic wheel. It's possible her character in the source novel had a less censor-friendly profession, but it doesn't work in the film. She's practically a saint (she only completes one miracle in the film).

The acting is fantastic—Parker's amazing as the manipulating, wheelchair-bound wife. Novak's great. Darren McGavin and Robert Strauss are excellent villains. McGavin would give the film's most astounding performance—of pure, friendly evil—if it weren't for Sinatra. Everything Sinatra does in the film, down to chewing on a cheese sandwich, is magnificent. Arnold Stang makes a great sidekick for him too.

The biggest problem with *The Man with the Golden Arm* is its cleanliness. It's a long film—the set makes it feel like a stage play, as do the lengthy conversations; time passes sort of just passes, a day here, a week there. It invites the viewer to think about what Sinatra's doing during these stretches, but then it goes and makes it impossible (he and Parker can't have a single calm moment together). There's so much discussion about upcoming, scheduled events, it's hard to remember they haven't already happened. Preminger needed to apply some of his directorial discipline on the script. By the time it reaches the inevitable—from the third or fourth scene—conclusion, it's hard to remember the film isn't already over.

But Sinatra's simply amazing. I mean, it's got a lot of other great acting—Parker, Novak, and McGavin—but it's inconceivable Sinatra's not better regarded for his acting skills.

Credits. Produced and directed by Otto Preminger; screenplay by Walter Newman and Lewis Meltzer, based on the novel by Nelson Algren; director of photography, Sam Leavitt; edited by Louis R. Loeffler; music by Elmer Bernstein; production designer, Joseph C. Wright; released by United Artists. Starring Frank Sinatra (Frankie Machine), Eleanor Parker (Zosch Machine), Kim Novak (Molly), Arnold Stang (Sparrow), Darren McGavin (Louie), Robert Strauss (Schwiefka), John Conte (Drunky), Doro Merande (Vi), George E. Stone (Sam Markette), George Mathews (Williams), Leonid Kinskey (Dominiwski) and Emile Meyer (Detective Bednar).

Genre. Drama.

Posted. 11 February 2009.

Weblink. <https://thestopbutton.com/2009/02/11/man-with-golden-arm-1955/>.

Descriptors. Arnold Stang, Darren McGavin, Eleanor Parker, Elmer Bernstein, Frank Sinatra, Kim Novak, Otto Preminger, *The Man with the Golden Arm*, United Artists.

Home video availability. DVD, Blu-ray (Region B), streaming.



Many Rivers to Cross 1955, Roy Rowland



If there's some lost Frontier genre—not a Western, because there aren't horses or cowboy hats—but a Frontier genre, with trappers and woods and... I don't know, some other stuff, *Many Rivers to Cross* is probably not the ideal example of its potential. I realize now, mentioning it, Michael Mann's *The Last of the Mohicans* is probably the ideal. Regardless, *Many Rivers to Cross* is unfortunately not the ideal of much anything. Any film co-starring Alan Hale Jr. and Russell Johnson long before "Gilligan's Island" ought to offer some comedic value along absurd lines, but this one doesn't. *Many Rivers to Cross* is a comedy, however. It's just not a funny one. Everything in the film—with the exception of a dying baby—is for a laugh. Given the story, with Eleanor Parker's frontier-woman (the film is dedicated the frontier-women no less) chasing Robert Taylor's bachelor trapper, it's a lot like a Road Runner cartoon—except one with really offensive portrayals of American Indians.

The Indian thing bugged me a little bit because it was played so much for laughs. Hollywood had known since, what, 1939, playing Indians as villains was lame and *Many Rivers* is from 1955. It was so lame, the first mohawked Indian I saw, I thought it was all a joke, like Taylor had this Indian running cons with him or something. I was rather disappointed it turned out to be otherwise; not just because it would have been less offensive, but because it might have been interesting.

The movie's short—ninety-five or so—and it's split evenly in two parts. One part has Victor McLaglen as Parker's father, the other part has Taylor mostly alone (though James Arness shows up for a bit). Both McLaglen and Arness are

good. Both Parker and Taylor are good. The film's just not any good. Without the Indian element, I'd call it inoffensive fare (and I doubt it was intended to be anything more). A programmer, actually—yep, it's a programmer.

Credits. Directed by Roy Rowland; screenplay by Harry Brown and Guy Trosper, from a story by Steve Frazee; director of photography, John F. Seitz; edited by Ben Lewis; music by Cyril J. Mockridge; produced by Jack Cummings; released by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. Starring Robert Taylor (Bushrod Gentry), Eleanor Parker (Mary Stuart Cherne), Victor McLaglen (Cadmus Cherne), Jeff Richards (Fremont Cherne), Russ Tamblyn (Shields Cherne), James Arness (Esau Hamilton), Alan Hale Jr. (Luke Radford), John Hudson (Hugh Cherne), Sig Ruman (Spectacle Man) and Russell Johnson (Banks Cherne).

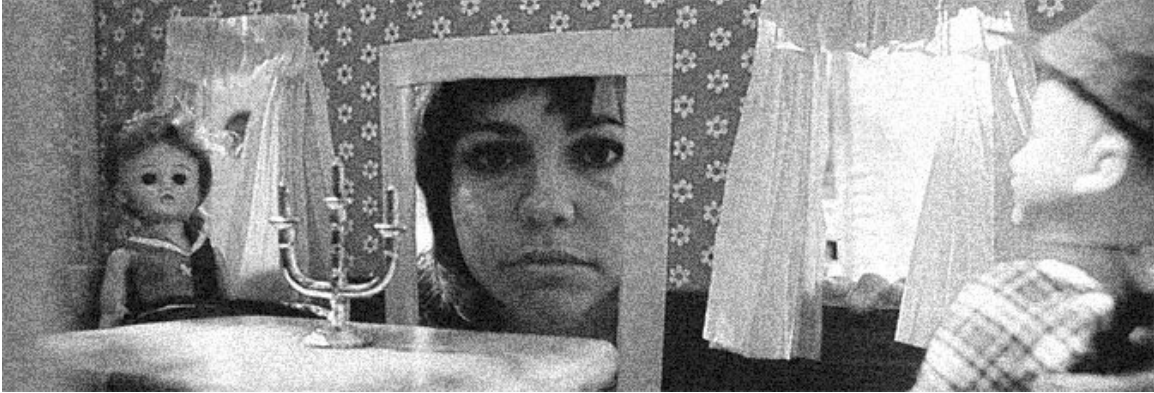
Genre. Classics.

Posted. 26 January 2007.

Weblink. <https://thestopbutton.com/2007/01/26/many-rivers-to-cross-1955/>.

Descriptors. Alan Hale Jr., Eleanor Parker, Harry Brown, James Arness, Many Rivers to Cross, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, Robert Taylor, Russ Tamblyn, Russell Johnson.

Home video availability. DVD, streaming.



Maybe I'll Come Home in the Spring 1971, Joseph Sargent



Maybe I'll Come Home in the Spring opens with a montage sequence. Sally Field is hitchhiking cross country (supposedly, it's all California) while audio of her calling home to her parents—after running away to become a hippie—and letting them know she's all right. The exact amount of time she's away, where she went, how she left, never gets addressed in the film; probably for the better. But that opening—followed by Field sneaking back into her house and her family going about their morning routine before finding her peacefully asleep in her bedroom—does frame Field as the subject of the film.

Turns out it's a red herring. Director Sargent, writer Bruce Feldman, and Field have a far more ambitious plan. Sargent, thanks to his actors, Feldman, and particularly editor Pembroke J. Herring, sets about deconstructing the nuclear family. There are frequent short flashbacks—presented as Field's memories—revealing the family's history and how it affects Field and little sister Lane Bradbury. Dad Jackie Cooper's loving as long as no one bothers him and everyone listens to him. Mom Eleanor Parker is underwhelmed too, but she and Cooper have separate beds and he makes good money, so with frequent alcohol, she's coping. Bradbury, it turns out, is on a similar path as Field took, though with drugs, which apparently wasn't Field's problem.

Feldman writes long scenes, which Sargent initially brackets with these uncomfortable panning shots. *Maybe* is a TV movie and it takes Sargent about fifteen minutes (of its seventy-and-change run time) to get comfortable having to pan to do establishing shots. By comfortable, I mean he stops trying to force wide establishing shots.

Anyway. The long scenes, as the family drama starts to play out, soon reveal just how much Field has changed. The movie's not about her, the movie's about this messed up family she's rejoining. And Field's performance just gets better and better throughout, as she understands more and more, no longer the teenager, not an adult in her parents' understanding but certainly from her (and the viewer's) perspective. Especially once the film gets to her parents' party with their horrifically shallow friends.

At the same time, Field's hippie boyfriend (David Carradine in an affable performance) is stealing various work vehicles to get back to her. Most of his character development happens in those flashback scenes, which doesn't seem like it's enough but turns out to be just right. Sargent really knows what he's doing with the pacing of character development. Not just with Field (though, obviously, most with her), but also with Carradine and Bradbury.

Parker and Cooper get established first, which seems like an odd choice given how the emphasis flips, but it too works out. It's their lives being deconstructed after all. Field and Bradbury are just the victims of their failures.

Cooper's great, Parker's great. Nobody's as great as Field, who asserts herself into the protagonist role without any direct help from Feldman's teleplay, albeit enabled by Sargent's spot-on direction. And Sargent and editor Herring establish this choppy, confrontational rhythm to *Maybe*. Sure, some of the hippie stuff comes off a little washed out thanks to TV and general squareness—and the Linda Ronstadt songs are forced over the action—but *Maybe I'll Come Home in the Spring* works out pretty darn well.

Credits. Produced and directed by Joseph Sargent; teleplay by Bruce Feldman; director of photography, Russell Metty; edited by Pembroke J. Herring; music by Earl Robinson; aired by the American Broadcasting Company. Starring Sally Field (Dennie), Lane Bradbury (Susie), Eleanor Parker (Claire), Jackie Cooper (Ed), and David Carradine (Flack).

Genre. Television.

Posted. 2 June 2017.

Weblink. <https://thestopbutton.com/2017/06/02/maybe-ill-come-home-spring-1971/>.

Descriptors. ABC, Bruce Feldman, David Carradine, Eleanor Parker, Jackie Cooper, Joseph Sargent, Lane Bradbury, *Maybe I'll Come Home in the Spring*, Sally Field.

Home video availability. DVD, streaming.



Men of the Sky

1942, B. Reeves Eason

Not Recommended

Men of the Sky opens with General Henry H. Arnold addressing a graduating class of air cadets. Charles P. Boyle's Technicolor photography is glorious and Harold McKernon's editing is outstanding and *Sky* feels like an almost too precious time capsule.

Only then the realism shatters when Arnold starts directly addressing actors, not actual air cadets. All of a sudden, though Boyle's photography remains wondrous throughout, *Sky's* propaganda becomes a chore to stomach. The problem's Owen Crump's script. Crump also narrates the short, so he's at least enthusiastic in that responsibility, but he can't string the elements together.

I think Eleanor Parker—as the wife of one of the pilots—has the most lines (like two of them); she's only in it for thirty seconds. None of the cast are particularly distinctive, not even with Crump trying so hard.

Even as propaganda, *Sky* is bad. Crump's too awful a writer.

Credits. Directed by B. Reeves Eason; written by Owen Crump; director of photography, Charles P. Boyle; edited by Harold McLernon; produced by Gordon Hollingshead; released by Warner Bros. Starring Tod Andrews (Cadet Frank Bickley), Eleanor Parker (Mrs. Frank Bickley), Don DeFore (Cadet Dick Mathews), Ray Montgomery (Cadet Jim Morgan), Ruth Ford (Cadet Gladdens' Sweetheart), Dave Willock (Bob 'Sir Galahad' Gladdens) and Henry H. Arnold (Himself); narrated by Owen Crump.

Genre. Short.

Posted. 30 October 2012.

Weblink. <https://thestopbutton.com/2012/10/30/men-sky-1942/>.

Descriptors. Dave Willock, Don DeFore, Eleanor Parker, Henry H. Arnold, Men of the Sky, Ray Montgomery, Ruth Ford, Tod Andrews, Warner Bros.

Home video availability. None.



A Millionaire for Christy **1951, George Marshall**



A Millionaire for Christy exemplifies why the screwball comedy doesn't work outside its era without a lot of tinkering. I can't even think of a good example of one working outside the 1930s right now, but I'm pretty sure there have been some. Maybe even recently. But *Christy* adapts a regular screwball comedy script for the filmmaking techniques of 1950. It shoots on location, which gives the scenes a sense of reality, which doesn't belong. These scenes give the characters a whole lot of weight—their problems become very real, instead of celluloid. The other problem with the film in terms of attempting to remake *Bringing Up Baby*, only without the budget or the script, is the first act. For a ninety minute movie, *Christy* has a thirty minute first act. For those thirty minutes, it pretends its it's directed by Howard Hawks, starring Cary Grant and Katharine Hepburn and it is not. At the thirty-minute mark, Eleanor Parker and Fred MacMurray finally get to start acting and the film takes a visible turn for the better (much better).

A screwball comedy requires the audience to acknowledge the artifice, so even after *Christy* stops pretending to be *Bringing Up Baby*, it still has those genuine shooting locations working against it. The film recovers for a couple reasons—three, actually. Parker, MacMurray, and Richard Carlson. Parker and MacMurray have real chemistry and Parker's excellent once her character has more depth than reluctant gold-digger. MacMurray's performance is pretty superficial, except in the romantic scenes with Parker, which pull the whole film together. Carlson, as MacMurray's fiancée's jilted boyfriend, is fantastic throughout, even during that lame first thirty. When he and Parker team up to break up MacMurray's engagement, there's plenty for him to do. There's a

standout scene with he and Parker getting drunk. Carlson not having done more comedies is unfortunate for the genre.

George Marshall, who did lots of films and lots of good ones (he directed *Destry Rides Again*), suffocates under the location shooting. There's a lot of standard screwball comedy moments—and Marshall turns them into material for a dark film noir about a man kidnapping a woman in broad daylight, assaulting photographers—the scenes aren't funny, they're disturbing. Certain scenes are meant to be done with that aforementioned artifice. Without it, the scenes play wrong.

Given that long first act, the resolution is really hurried, but it is where some of *Christy's* more original moments play out, if only because there's only three minutes to finish the picture. Another affecting part of the film is Carlson's psychiatrist's real concern for poor people with mental illnesses. It's a serious subject and when it comes up during Carlson's fantastic drunk sense, it fosters a resentment of the film for being superfluous, not just this one, but the medium in general. It's off-putting and it's hard for the scene to recover after it... and when it does, it's only because of Carlson and Parker's acting.

Also, the title is a bit of a misdirection. Parker's Christabel is only called *Christy* once in the whole film, but it also suggests it's a search for a millionaire, the other side of *Seven Chances* perhaps. But still, it's worthwhile for Parker, Carlson, and MacMurray when he's with Parker—not to mention as an example of location shooting's effect on filmic storytelling.

Credits. Directed by George Marshall; screenplay by Ken Englund, based on a story by Robert Harari; director of photography, Harry Stradling Sr.; edited by Daniel Mandell; music by David Chudnow and Victor Young; produced by Bert E. Friedlob; released by 20th Century Fox. Starring Fred MacMurray (Peter Ulysses Lockwood), Eleanor Parker (Christabel 'Christy' Sloane), Richard Carlson (Dr. Roland Cook), Kay Buckley (June Chandler), Una Merkel (Patsy Clifford), Douglass Dumbrille (A.K. Thompson), Raymond Greenleaf (Benjamin Chandler) and Nestor Paiva (Mr. Rapello).

Genre. Classics.

Posted. 22 August 2007.

Weblink. <https://thestopbutton.com/2007/08/22/a-millionaire-for-christy-1951/>.

Descriptors. 20th Century Fox, A Millionaire for Christy, Eleanor Parker, Fred MacMurray, George Marshall, Nestor Paiva, Richard Carlson, Una Merkel, Victor Young.

Home video availability. DVD, streaming.



Mission to Moscow

1943, Michael Curtiz



Mission to Moscow is straight propaganda. There's a lot of Hollywood propaganda in the early 1940s, even the late 1930s, but usually, with those films, there's at least the pretense of dramatic storytelling. There's a love story attached, maybe a love triangle, something. There's nothing attached to *Mission to Moscow*. It's essentially a long advertisement for the Soviet Union. Most amusing, I suppose, is when Stalin himself shows up. The film's from 1943, so nobody knew about him yet.

Walter Huston plays the ambassador to Russia and his story sort of guides the film. It follows him, but the way he moves is for the exposition, not for the character. There isn't a single conflict for his character in the entire film. Huston's fantastic, of course, but he's better at the beginning. For most of the film he looks concerned or he gives speeches, but at the beginning there's still some dramatic excitement. There are a number of other good performances, particularly Oskar Homolka.

As long as *Mission to Moscow* is, it's competently told—writing this screenplay later got Howard Koch blacklisted—and there are a number of nice segments. The film ought to be famous as Michael Curtiz's follow-up to *Casablanca* (but isn't) and it's probably his strongest directorial effort. There's one particular scene, at a formal reception, which is beautifully constructed. The camera moves from each country's representatives, both establishing their political situation as well as the particularities of the characters. It's too bad this scene—as well as an excellent trial scene—are surrounded by such boring material.

The film plays on Turner Classic Movies from time to time and I read Warner

Bros. is considering a DVD release (though I don't know as part of what collection—no one knows Huston or Curtiz anymore).

Credits. Directed by Michael Curtiz; screenplay by Howard Koch, based on the book by Joseph E. Davies; director of photography, Bert Glennon; edited by Owen Marks; music by Max Steiner; produced by Robert Bruckner; released by Warner Bros. Starring Walter Huston (Ambassador Joseph E. Davies), Ann Harding (Mrs. Marjorie Davies), Oskar Homolka (Maxim Litvinov, Foreign Minister), George Tobias (Freddie), Gene Lockhart (Premier Molotov), Eleanor Parker (Emlen Davies), Richard Travis (Paul), Helmut Dantine (Major Kamenev), Victor Francen (Vyshinsky, chief trial prosecutor), Henry Daniell (Minister von Ribbentrop), Barbara Everest (Mrs. Litvinov), Dudley Field Malone (Winston Churchill), Roman Bohnen (Mr. Krestinsky), Maria Palmer (Tanya Litvinov), Moroni Olsen (Colonel Faymonville), Minor Watson (Loy Henderson), Vladimir Sokoloff (Mikhail Kalinin, USSR president), Maurice Schwartz (Dr. Botkin) and Joseph E. Davies (Himself).

Genre. Classics.

Posted. 2 March 2006.

Weblink. <https://thestopbutton.com/2006/03/02/mission-to-moscow-1943/>.

Descriptors. Ann Harding, Eleanor Parker, Gene Lockhart, George Tobias, Max Steiner, Michael Curtiz, Mission to Moscow, Walter Huston, Warner Bros.

Home video availability. DVD.



The Mysterious Doctor **1943, Benjamin Stoloff**

★★½

Apparently, the last time I saw *The Mysterious Doctor* (in 2001), I didn't think much of it, rating it at one and a half. It's a little low, since the film transcends propaganda, which many 1940s propaganda films did, but *The Mysterious Doctor* does it in interesting ways. Its mood isn't the usual for a propaganda film. Instead of an espionage thriller or a war film, it's a ghost story. The first time I saw the film, I compared it—as many do—to a Universal monster movie of the same era. It's actually not. If it emulates any form, it's a Val Lewton film. While the setting—a small English village—and the frequent fog might suggest the Universal films, *The Mysterious Doctor* spends a lot of time on bit characters, something the Universal films had long since stopped doing by 1942. There's also something else... humor. *The Mysterious Doctor* has some gags and funny lines; there's a definite emphasis on amusing the audience.

The film's pace has a lot to do with its success. It runs under an hour and probably has a present action of three or four days yet, there are subplots and, until the awkwardly staged finale, some rather good performances. Warner used to use their "B" pictures to groom actors for the "A" films and, in *Mysterious Doctor*, it's pretty obvious who they were grooming—Eleanor Parker. Though she doesn't show up until ten or twelve minutes into the film (with a fifty-seven minute picture, that delay is considerable), once she does, she's the film's protagonist, with a rather forceful performance. She's got some good scenes and she gives one particularly great speech, chastising the terrified men of the village. John Loder's perfectly sturdy—until the end, when most things are falling apart anyway—and their two performances make up for the weaker ones... particularly Bruce Lester, who isn't terrible, but he's flimsy.

Technically speaking, Stoloff's is decent, more impressive when he's not doing the thriller aspects of the film. I can't remember if the script's predictable—I remembered one of the major twists a few minutes into the film and it seems pretty obvious, so it probably is an unsurprising experience, which is fine. It's a nice package.

Credits. Directed by Benjamin Stoloff; written by Richard Weil; director of photography, Henry Sharp; edited by Clarence Koster; released by Warner Bros. Starring John Loder (Sir Henry Leland), Eleanor Parker (Letty Carstairs), Bruce Lester (Lt. Christopher 'Kit' Hilton), Lester Matthew (Dr. Frederick Holmes), Forrester Harvey (Hugh Penhryn) and Matt Willis (Bart Redmond).

Genre. Classics.

Posted. 11 July 2007.

Weblink. <https://thestopbutton.com/2007/07/11/the-mysterious-doctor-1943/>.

Descriptors. Bruce Lester, Eleanor Parker, Forrester Harvey, Henry Sharp, John Loder, Matt Willis, Richard Weil, The Mysterious Doctor, Warner Bros.

Home video availability. None.



The Naked Jungle **1954, Byron Haskin**

★★★½

If there are faults with *The Naked Jungle*, ones not the result of having to follow the Hays Code—which the film skirts thanks to Ben Maddow and Ranald MacDougall’s excellent dialogue, Eleanor Parker’s fantastic, intelligent performance and Charlton Heston’s brute force approach—they fall on director Haskin. The film is well-directed with Parker and Heston’s character drama, even with the special effects heavy expository shots, but Haskin refuses to get too far into any characters’ perspective, which cuts down on the thrills.

Oddly enough, I just realized the film opens on a shot from Parker’s perspective. One she even discusses with co-star William Conrad. But, even when it would serve a scene to go with the character’s perspective, Haskin does not. He’s lucky the script and actors can carry it.

But that odd directing misstep, which is most problematic in the third act, can’t overshadow Haskin’s excellent work in the rest of the picture. Parker’s a mail order bride, Heston’s her plantation owner—an extraordinarily good one, the film carefully reveals—husband. They don’t get along. Parker does some great work from her first scene (that one with Conrad); she establishes herself quickly. Heston’s more of the one with the internal character arc. Parker—and the viewer—are basically just waiting for him to grow up. And it’s a lot of fun watching him grow up. On one hand, there’s this refined (while still playful), thoughtful performance from Parker. Heston’s not refined or even playful. He’s really good at being a complete jackass. He runs with it. It works out.

It’s forty-five minutes into *The Naked Jungle* before the possibility of action thrills get revealed, but then the script puts it off even more. The character drama

is the most important part of the film. Once it's resolved, then Heston gets to be an action star. Somewhat late into the thrills even—by the time he comes to the rescue, *The Naked Jungle* has gone through many of its excellent special effects process shots. Some great matte paintings in the film.

What makes the film so peculiar is the script. Maddow and MacDougall are deliberate in how they make work Parker and Heston's relationship. Until they're a duo, the action barely ever plays to anything but furthering their personal conflict.

It's rather neatly done. And beautifully acted. Heston clearly loves the role as white savior, Parker's magnificent, Conrad's fun as serious comic relief. Great photography from Ernest Laszlo and an effective Daniele Amfitheatrof score round it off.

Credits. Directed by Byron Haskin; screenplay by Ben Maddow and Ranald MacDougall, based on a story by Carl Stephenson; director of photography, Ernest Laszlo; edited by Everett Douglas; music by Daniele Amfitheatrof; produced by George Pal; released by Paramount Pictures. Starring Eleanor Parker (Joanna), Charlton Heston (Leiningen), William Conrad (Commissioner), Abraham Sofaer (Incacha), Norma Calderón (Zala), Romo Vincent (Boat Captain) and John Dierkes (Gruber).

Genre. Classics.

Posted. 25 September 2015.

Weblink. <https://thestopbutton.com/2015/09/25/naked-jungle-1954/>.

Descriptors. Abraham Sofaer, Byron Haskin, Charlton Heston, Eleanor Parker, George Pal, John Dierkes, Paramount Pictures, The Naked Jungle, William Conrad.

Home video availability. DVD, streaming.



Never Say Goodbye **1946, James V. Kern**



The first thirty-nine percent of *Never Say Goodbye* is phenomenally paced. It could be a short movie, if there were a little tragedy through in. A little melodrama. Seven year-old Patti Brady is moving back in with mom Eleanor Parker after living six months with dad Errol Flynn. They're divorced. Flynn's a successful cheesecake pinup artist and a cad, Parker was his star model and a Fifth Avenue blue blood. But they still love each other, Brady just knows they do.

And, even just as light forties screwball, it's pretty good. S.Z. Sakall is the loveably inept owner of their favorite restaurant, Flynn is charming, Parker is lovely. Brady's kind of cute. Her performance is fine. She's not too obnoxious. She's good with the other actors, but less so when she's got to do a scene on her own. Hattie McDaniel's her nurse. McDaniel's good. Everyone's kind of good.

Only then the script jumps ahead two months. I.A.L. Diamond and director Kern, in the second two thirds of the film, basically just string together screwball sequences. Not bad ones, but not great ones. It doesn't help Lucile Watson—as Parker's disapproving mother—is no fun. She's not bad, just no fun. Donald Woods is no good as Parker's new suitor, even if he does get one of the good screwball sequences.

The last third is similar. Forrest Tucker shows up. McDaniel and Watson (and Woods) are all gone. There's new screwball, but nothing particularly good; it's the weakest section—Parker's characterization completely changes and Brady becomes incidental.

A lot of it is Kern's mediocre direction—he manages to mess up a sequence where Flynn is pretending to be a Bogart tough guy (voiced by Bogart himself)—and a lot of it is the script. Flynn's character is generic. Parker's is even more generic. They're both charming but don't really have any chemistry. They're far better with Brady than one another, which really cuts into the film itself's charm.

It's a really boring movie too. It's less than a hundred minutes, but once that first third is up? *Never Say Goodbye* never gets moving again.

Credits. Directed by James V. Kern; screenplay by I.A.L. Diamond and Kern, adaptation by Lewis R. Foster, based on a story by Ben Barzman and Norma Barzman; director of photography, Arthur Edeson; edited by Folmar Blangsted; music by Friedrich Hollaender; produced by William Jacobs; released by Warner Bros. Starring Errol Flynn (Phil), Eleanor Parker (Ellen), Patti Brady (Flip), S.Z. Sakall (Luigi), Hattie McDaniel (Cozy), Forrest Tucker (Cpl. Lonkowski), Donald Woods (Rex), Peggy Knudsen (Nancy Graham), Tom D'Andrea (Jack Gordon), and Lucile Watson (Mrs. Hamilton).

Genre. Classics.

Posted. 10 March 2017.

Weblink. <https://thestopbutton.com/2017/03/10/never-say-goodbye-1946/>.

Descriptors. Donald Woods, Eleanor Parker, Errol Flynn, Forrest Tucker, Hattie McDaniel, Never Say Goodbye, S.Z. Sakall, Warner Bros., William Jacobs.

Home video availability. DVD, streaming.



Once Upon a Spy 1980, Ivan Nagy



Once Upon a Spy is a strange result. I mean, it's a TV movie (pilot) for a spy series, complete with a kind of great James Bond-lite seventies music from John Cacavas, Christopher Lee in a electronic wheelchair with a rocket launcher, spy mistress Eleanor Parker working out of a secret headquarters in the Magic Mountain amusement park... oh, and leads Ted Danson and Mary Louise Weller bicker adorably. And Welsh writer Jimmy Sangster makes American Parker say "bloody" a lot because he doesn't care what Americans sound like.

I'm getting ahead of myself because there are two things to examine and the rest of it all makes sense.

First, Sangster's script. It's boring—I can't imagine not changing the channel from *Once Upon a Spy* on a relatively temperate Monday night in February 1980. There's no chemistry between the characters. Sangster can't even try to figure out how to force it into the script. There's some attempt to address sexism—though Danson's dorky computer guy (who all the ladies love—literally, two attempt to grope him) doesn't know anything, he ignores everything Weller's super spy tells him. Because, as it turns out, Danson's the one evil mastermind Lee is really after. Danson beat him for the "Einstein Award for Smart People" once and Lee has never forgotten it.

Really.

But if there were chemistry—if Lee and Danson facing off actually did anything, if Danson had an iota of charm outside the strange experience of seeing him so completely without the thing his career's based on, if Weller's

finale outfit didn't go through three changes (from cleavage to no cleavage but leather cords wrapped around her legs to a version where it's no longer a jumpsuit), if Nagy actually had any concept of how to pull off a spy movie based on charm—well, if any of those things, *Once Upon a Spy* might be somewhat successful.

Instead, Danson comes off like a wooden plank. Despite a little bit of a belly, he's clearly a physical guy. He'd need to be to have the endurance for all the women falling over him. He doesn't play computer nerd well, he doesn't banter with Weller well, he doesn't banter with Lee well, he doesn't banter with Parker well. Maybe there are three big problems with *Spy*—Sangster, Nagy, and Danson. Maybe it's not just Nagy's lack of direction to his actors or Sangster's lame writing, maybe it's Danson himself. But with the direction and writing being so problematic, it's impossible to know.

It's concerning ABC let this one get made with such a dearth of chemistry between its leads. Even if it was in 1979... because there's nothing there and it wastes Weller's time. And she's pretty good, all things considered. Once Sangster's got her established as overcoming polite sexism to become a super spy, he's got nothing else for her to do except babysit Danson. Her relationship with Parker is cold because Sangster writes Parker's character so badly. Maybe if the character were exaggeratedly British, but instead it's just Parker in a conference room all to herself with nothing to chew on. Nagy's got no idea what to do with actors.

After Weller, the best performance is probably Lee. If only because he's a mad scientist who has created a shrinking ray and has to pretend Ted Danson is a worthy intellectual nemesis. Then Parker, who has nothing to do, but does it with professionalism and dignity and as much style as she can get away with given the lame script and direction.

Once Upon a Spy is disappointing. It just needed to be cute and fun. Still, it's competent as far as most television movies go and Weller's likable. And that music's all right.

Credits. Directed by Ivan Nagy; teleplay by Jimmy Sangster, based on a story by Lemuel Pitkin and Sangster; director of photography, Dennis Dalzell; edited by Bob Fish and William Neel; music by John Cacavas; production designer, Duane Alt; produced by Jay Daniel; aired by the American Broadcasting Network. Starring Ted Danson (Jack Chenault), Mary Louise Weller (Tannehill), Eleanor Parker (The Lady), Leonard Stone (Dr. Webster), and Christopher Lee (Marcus Valorium).

Genre. Television.

Posted. 22 January 2017.

Weblink. <https://thestopbutton.com/2017/01/22/once-upon-spy-1980/>.

Descriptors. ABC, Bob Fish, Christopher Lee, Eleanor Parker, Jay Daniel, Leonard Stone, Mary Louise Weller, Once Upon a Spy, Ted Danson.

Home video availability. DVD.



The Oscar

1966, Russell Rouse

The Oscar is a spectacular kind of awful. It's the perfect storm of content, casting and technical ineptitude. Director Rouse probably doesn't have a single good shot in the entire film. It might not even be possible with Joseph Ruttenberg's photography and the maybe studio television level of the set decoration. Though there is this inexplicably good shot of Eleanor Parker during her awful monologue.

Oh, right, the awful monologues. Not everyone gets one. Parker gets one, Jill St. John gets one, Tony Bennett gets one, Milton Berle gets one—okay, well, actually pretty much everyone gets one and they're part of what makes *The Oscar* such a worthwhile terrible movie. Rouse seems completely unaware lead Stephen Boyd is supposed to be playing a jerk. He's also completely unaware lead Stephen Boyd is giving a truly awful performance. Tony Bennett is really bad too, but he's in it less. It's all bad Boyd, all the time.

Elke Sommer's Boyd's wife. I think she may have the shortest monologue. *The Oscar*—Rouse and cowriters Harlan Ellison and Clarence Greene in particular—doesn't think much of Sommer. She's a flakey virginal hippie. Boyd must seduce aware her innocence but then she disgusts him. Right after she disgusts him, Sommer's wardrobe essentially becomes exquisite and quite revealing lingerie. She's got a scene at the end of the movie—maybe even her monologue moment but it's out of character so less effective—but otherwise she becomes background.

Berle and Parker do as best with what they can. They're old Hollywood players, Parker should know better than to lust, which Berle has to remind her

about because he's the virtuous dude. Cotten's a virtuous dude too but he's got nothing going on. He's not dynamic enough for the part. It's not like he's Orson Welles signing the standard rich and famous contract for Boyd.

Edie Adams is legitimately good, ditto Peter Lawford. St. John tries and it helps a lot, especially since she gets nothing off her costars. Ernest Borgnine is fine but like a sleazy detective on a family show. He's not supposed to be too sleazy, he's somebody's drunken, blackmailing uncle after all.

Really bad—really amusingly bad—music from Percy Faith. The script is a strange mix of okay one-liners, creepy misogyny and lame dialogue.

The only actual good thing about *The Oscar* is Edith Head—who even cameos—and her gowns. They're stunning. Rouse doesn't know he's got this Edith Head fashion show to be directing. Instead he's doing a... well, it's impossible to say. You actually have to see *The Oscar* to understand *The Oscar*.

Credits. Directed by Russell Rouse; screenplay by Harlan Ellison, Rouse and Clarence Greene; director of photography, Joseph Ruttenberg; edited by Chester W. Schaeffer; music by Percy Faith; produced by Greene; released by Embassy Pictures. Starring Stephen Boyd (Frank Fane), Tony Bennett (Hymie Kelly), Elke Sommer (Kay Bergdahl), Milton Berle (Kappy Kapstetter), Joseph Cotten (Kenneth Regan), Eleanor Parker (Sophie Cantaro), Jill St. John (Laurel Scott), Edie Adams (Trina Yale), Ernest Borgnine (Barney Yale) and Peter Lawford (Steve Marks).

Genre. Drama.

Posted. 27 August 2016.

Weblink. <https://thestopbutton.com/2016/08/27/oscar-1966/>.

Descriptors. Eleanor Parker, Elke Sommer, Embassy Pictures, Ernest Borgnine, Jill St. John, Milton Berle, Peter Lawford, The Oscar, Tony Bennett.

Home video availability. None.



Panic Button

1964, George Sherman



Watching *Panic Button*, two adjectives came to mind repeatedly. Anemic and stupefying. It's incredible the things the film can't make funny—like Maurice Chevalier, Carlo Croccolo and Eleanor Parker dressed up as nuns trying to make it to a Venice film festival. Not the Venice Film Festival, because the one in *Panic Button* also shows TV pilots. But director Sherman—or whoever directed the chase sequence (there's also an Italian language version of the film directed by Giuliano Carnimeo and it could have just been second unit)—bombs it. It's never funny, even though Parker and Croccolo are working. Poor Chevalier, on the other hand, becomes a metaphor for the film itself.

Panic Button is about the New York mob needing to lose half a million dollars. There's an expository prologue with bad acting and worse dubbing. Mob boss's son Mike Connors flies to Rome to make a TV pilot starring Chevalier, whose movies are poorly rated on late night television. It's not a stupid idea for a movie, but everything except the idea is stupid. Connors falls for leading lady Jayne Mansfield, except they have no chemistry. Independently, they're both actually fine—and even though it's still not funny, Sherman's best direction is of the female actors—Mansfield and Parker—but together they're charmless. Meanwhile, Chevalier is living off his ex-wife (Parker) in some kind of fantasy world where he's an accomplished actor. He's not believable having a single movie credit to his name, much less enough to provoke marketing research.

The first act isn't too bad, actually. Parker is great. She's about the only one who makes *Panic Button* feel like a real movie and not, you know, something someone had to lose half a million dollars making. The film plays Chevalier's

character and the actor himself as a patsy, which is unfortunate. Awful editing from Gene Ruggiero doesn't help. Sherman's direction is no shakes whatsoever, but Ruggiero can't even cut screwball banter. Well, wait. Sherman shoots it too wide so maybe there's just nothing to cut.

And Parker and Connors have a lot of chemistry. So it reflects poorly on his character when Mansfield's cleavage wins his heart. Of course, it's fine for Parker. Even though she was married to Chevalier and then supported him for years after their divorce, it turns out she didn't know him at all and there's a chance for reconnection. Unfortunately, no one seems to have let Chevalier in on that development because his performance—regardless of the bad writing—is utterly one note.

Panic Button even manages to screw up Akim Tamiroff as a wacky acting instructor who ineptly directs the TV pilot.

And the music from Georges Garvarentz is super lame.

However, while *Panic Button* doesn't have anything to recommend it—unless one wants to see Parker hold half the movie up with expressions or a travelogue of sixties Rome and Venice—the cast does do enough solid work it's not a complete waste of time. Even with the mindnumbingly long chase sequence and a cruel (and inept) finale, Parker, Connors, Mansfield, Croccolo and even Chevalier to some degree take *Panic Button* seriously enough it's not an abject failure.

Credits. Directed by George Sherman; screenplay by Stephen Longstreet and Hal Biller, based on a story by Morton Friedman; director of photography, Enzo Serafin; edited by Gene Ruggiero; music by Georges Garvarentz; produced by Ron Gorton; released by Gorton Associates. Starring Mike Connors (Frank Pagano), Eleanor Parker (Louise Harris), Maurice Chevalier (Philippe Fontaine), Jayne Mansfield (Angela), Vincent Barbi (Mario), Carlo Croccolo (Guido) and Akim Tamiroff (Pandowski).

Genre. Comedy.

Posted. 23 November 2016.

Weblink. <https://thestopbutton.com/2016/11/23/panic-button-1964/>.

Descriptors. Akim Tamiroff, Carlo Croccolo, Eleanor Parker, George Sherman, Gorton Associates, Jayne Mansfield, Maurice Chevalier, Mike Connors, Panic Button.

Home video availability. DVD.



Pride of the Marines

1945, Delmer Daves

★½

Pride of the Marines is a disappointment. It never gets particularly good, but it does have a lot of potential—at least from its cast—so when it starts getting better and then slips, it's a disappointment. The film starts before Pearl Harbor with John Garfield's would-be bachelor falling for Eleanor Parker. Garfield's reasoning for wanting to be a bachelor is he wants to live his life like a nine year-old boy, going to sporting events, going hunting, never having a woman tell him no.

Garfield's reasonably likable, but he's not good in this part. Albert Maltz's writing for Garfield is juvenile, while everyone else in the cast gets a good part. It's not just Parker, who actually gets to act when tolerating Garfield's hijinks, it's even Garfield's friends (and landlords) Ann Doran and John Ridgely. Garfield's friendship with their daughter, played by Ann E. Todd, is his most honest character relationship even though it doesn't make any sense given how juvenile he behaves. There's one caveat to Doran and Ridgely's performances—when they have to spout exposition about how Garfield just can't grow up, they can't sell it. Only Parker can sell those moments, at least until the second part of the film.

During the first part of the film—there's a lot to *Pride*, given it's two hours and has three distinct sections—Daves is ambitious with his direction. Lots of extravagant setups. They usually work, except Owen Marks's editing of the footage is very messy. It looks like Daves didn't shoot the right coverage, especially when he has to account for Garfield and Parker being much shorter than Ridgely and Doran. But Daves goes for big shots. They work.

Then Garfield goes to war. After some understandably used, but ill-fitting, real footage from the Pacific Theater, Daves settles into a decent battle sequence. It's a nightmarish sequence with excellent photography from J. Peverell Marley (his best in the film) and music from Franz Waxman (his best in the film). Even Marks's editing is strong. It's also the best sequence in the entire picture, because once it's over, *Pride* moves on to its next location and an all new set of problems.

Garfield's injured. He's possibly blind. Can a nine year-old boy imagine his girl back home wanting him? No. But he also can't imagine anything else. But *Pride of the Marines* is a forties patriotic picture and so everyone else around Garfield is pretty much handling their wounds with dignity. Although Maltz doesn't exactly have anything for them to talk about. There's one rousing scene where Dane Clark—who's great—talks about fighting for himself and his country (as a Jewish guy in the service—there's even a great anti-racism sequence, albeit only in regards to Mexicans, it's from 1945 and Warner after all), but otherwise these guys have nothing to talk about except girls. If a reverse Bechdel didn't sound like a tricky Olympic dive, I'd say it fails the reverse Bechdel. But, really, all these guys have to talk about is their girls back home for the most part. The acting from the bit players is fine, Maltz just doesn't give them anything to say.

Rosemary DeCamp shows up in Garfield's recovery as his suffering Red Cross worker. She has to hold his hand through everything because otherwise how can we see Garfield's struggle. Only it's not a struggle. Daves doesn't give him much to do as far as acting. He just acts up. The one or two chances he gets for a good scene get messed up by over-production.

The acting from Parker is good no matter what, no matter how lame the writing gets. Same goes for Clark, who seemingly gets better as his material gets more obvious. Doran, DeCamp, Ridgely, Todd, all good. Garfield sort of gets an incomplete, sort of gets a pass. The film drops the ball on a lot—like how does Garfield feel about being a national hero who loathes himself—and the ending feels tacked on.

Pride of the Marines has its built-in constraints—it's a forties propaganda picture, after all—but every opportunity it gets to surmount them, it fails. Though Daves's first act creativity does come back for one shot at the end. Only for him to screw it up with the boringly directed finale.

Credits. Directed by Delmer Daves; screenplay by Marvin Borowsky and Albert Maltz, based on a book by Roger Butterfield; director of photography, J. Peverell Marley; edited by Owen Marks; music by Franz

Waxman; produced by Jerry Wald; released by Warner Bros. Starring John Garfield (Al Schmid), Eleanor Parker (Ruth Hartley), Dane Clark (Lee Diamond), Ann Doran (Ella Mae Merchant), John Ridgely (Jim Merchant), Rosemary DeCamp (Virginia Pfeiffer), Anthony Caruso (Johnny Rivers) and Ann E. Todd (Loretta Merchant).

Genre. Classics.

Posted. 30 September 2016.

Weblink. <https://thestopbutton.com/2016/09/30/pride-marines-1945/>.

Descriptors. Ann Doran, Anthony Caruso, Dane Clark, Delmer Daves, Eleanor Parker, John Garfield, Pride of the Marines, Rosemary DeCamp, Warner Bros.

Home video availability. DVD.



Return to Peyton Place

1961, José Ferrer

I've read a review of *Return to Peyton Place* positing the whole film as a disservice to Mary Astor. It might have been Maltin. Right now, I'm reading Bruce Eder's review over at allmovie. Eder's a smarty-pants (he does or did a lot of scholarly audio commentaries) and I'd almost recommend it over my own post, because I made a few of the same observations. *Return to Peyton Place* starts out bad, with Rosemary Clooney singing a silly song over location shots of the town. The first *Peyton Place* had a great score—if it was a little derivative of Aaron Copland's *Our Town* score—and the first couple seconds of music in *Return to Peyton Place* seemed all right... then the singing started. Clooney was married to director José Ferrer at the time and one imagines there's a connection to her involvement.

Worse, the first scene is with Carol Lynley. I'm a *Peyton Place* fan and I can imagine how upset people seeing this film in the theater would have been. Lynley is a poor substitute for Diane Varsi, who originated the role. Poor substitute might be too polite. Lynley's acting is a crime against celluloid. But then Eleanor Parker and Tuesday Weld and Mary Astor show up—and here's where Eder and I agree—and Mary Astor's first scene is really good. Immediately after, she becomes Mrs. Bates, complete with haunted house, but the first scene is good. Tuesday Weld manages to have a few good moments, but she's busy being in love with Swedish sky instructor—she visibly competent, though I don't know if I'd say anything if I didn't know she turned well. Eleanor Parker—replacing Lana Turner, who was the lead in the original *Peyton Place*—is around because she has to be, but there's no emphasis on her. It's a bad sequel in that way—it's set after the events in *Peyton Place*, but certain things didn't happen....

The idea of the film—besides Mary Astor combating her son’s new, pregnant Italian bride (Fox was very international with *Return to Peyton Place*)—is Lynley writing a book a lot like... *Peyton Place*. The novel was (I’m Googling for the appropriate adjective) notorious at its publication. That idea of turning that notoriety into filmic content in a sequel, it’s not a bad one. It would allow for the film to cover the existing situations in the narrative and create all sorts of conflicts and yada yada yada, but it’s so poorly handled, it just doesn’t work. Jeff Chandler—who’s good—is bad in *Return to Peyton Place*. He doesn’t fit the role of book publisher and his scenes are all with Lynley and... oh, they’re awful together.

It’s hard to imagine a good sequel to *Peyton Place*. You would need the entire cast to return. You would need five or six stories, good ones (instead of two and a half bad ones). You’d need a good writer—though, *Return to Peyton Place*’s scenes are competently paced—and you’d need a good director. But still, even with all of those components (and *Return to Peyton Place* has none of those components), there still isn’t a good artistic reason for a sequel....

Credits. Directed by José Ferrer; screenplay by Ronald Alexander, based on a novel by Grace Metalious; director of photography, Charles G. Clarke; edited by David Bretherton; music by Franz Waxman; produced by Jerry Wald; released by 20th Century Fox. Starring Carol Lynley (Allison MacKenzie), Jeff Chandler (Lewis Jackman), Eleanor Parker (Connie Rossi), Mary Astor (Mrs. Roberta Carter), Robert Sterling (Mike Rossi), Luciana Paluzzi (Raffaella Carter), Brett Halsey (Ted Carter), Gunnar Hellström (Nils Larsen) and Tuesday Weld (Selena Cross).

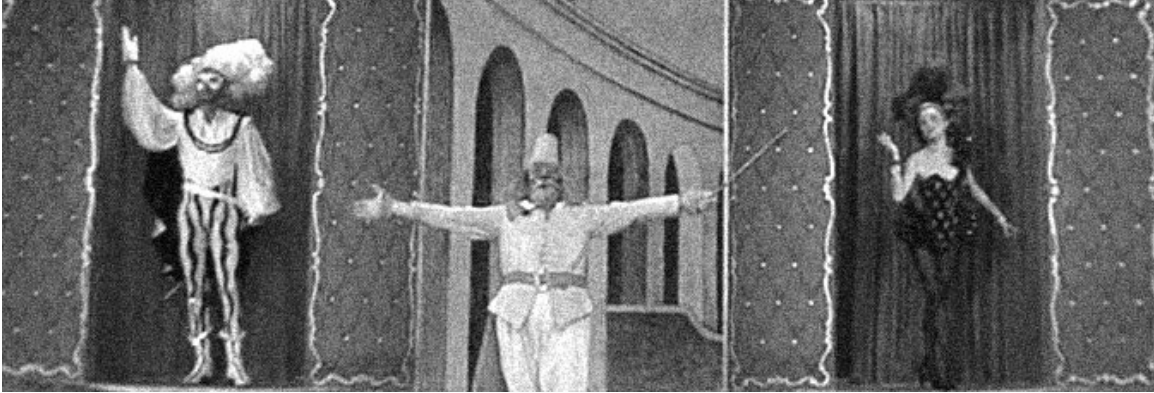
Genre. Drama.

Posted. 2 May 2006.

Weblink. <https://thestopbutton.com/2006/05/02/return-to-peyton-place-1961/>.

Descriptors. 20th Century Fox, Carol Lynley, Eleanor Parker, Jeff Chandler, Jose Ferrer, Luciana Paluzzi, Mary Astor, Return to Peyton Place, Tuesday Weld.

Home video availability. DVD, streaming.



Scaramouche

1952, George Sidney



Scaramouche is a deliberately constructed film. I'm curious if screenwriters Ronald Millar and George Froeschel followed the source novel's plot structure, because it's a very peculiar series of events. It doesn't open with the leading man, instead starting out with villain Mel Ferrer. Janet Leigh, as his love interest, gets introduced long before Eleanor Parker—who's second-billed and leading man Stewart Granger's love interest.

Except, of course, Ferrer and Granger are Frenchmen so the idea of them having one love interest is... against their character. But there's also the matter of Richard Anderson, who sort of sets off the big plot—Granger's want for vengeance—and on and on.

Director Sidney does a beautiful job focusing the viewers attention where it needs to be in each scene, but also where it's going to need to be in the next scene. A couple huge details—maybe even three—only come up in dialogue. *Scaramouche* isn't a film for the disinterested viewer.

But it'd be hard not to be enraptured with the picture. Charles Rosher's lush color cinematography—which equally showcases the fantastic location action sequences but also the eye-shadow they've got on Parker—makes for a transfixing experience.

All the acting is good. Granger's an able leading man, Ferrer's fantastic as the villain, Parker's outstanding in the most complicated role. In the second most complicated (the men aren't complicated though so it's not much), Leigh occasionally wavers but is still quite strong.

Wonderful Victor Young score too.

Scaramouche is delightfully thrilling.

Credits. Directed by George Sidney; screenplay by Ronald Millar and George Froeschel, based on the novel by Rafael Sabatini; director of photography, Charles Rosher; edited by James E. Newcom; music by Victor Young; produced by Carey Wilson; released by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. Starring Stewart Granger (Andre Moreau), Eleanor Parker (Lenore), Janet Leigh (Aline de Gavrillac), Mel Ferrer (Noel, Marquis de Maynes), Henry Wilcoxon (Chevalier de Chabrilaine), Nina Foch (Marie Antoinette), Richard Anderson (Philippe de Valmorin), Robert Coote (Gaston Binet) and Lewis Stone (Georges de Valmorin).

Genre. Classics.

Posted. 24 March 2014.

Weblink. <https://thestopbutton.com/2014/03/24/scaramouche-1952/>.

Descriptors. Eleanor Parker, Henry Wilcoxon, Janet Leigh, Mel Ferrer, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, Nina Foch, Richard Anderson, Scaramouche, Stewart Granger.

Home video availability. DVD, streaming.



Seven Miles of Bad Road

1963, Douglas Heyes

Not Recommended

Once you get past Jeffrey Hunter (at thirty-seven) playing a character about fifteen years younger—and some other significant bumps, *Seven Miles of Bad Road* isn't entirely bad. It shouldn't be entirely bad, even with those bumps, but it's an episode of "The Chrysler Theatre," shot on limited sets with limited imagination from director Heyes.

Heyes also wrote the teleplay, which tries real hard. Heyes is talking about big issues—he's talking about men, women, post-war, youth, age, responsibility, regret. There's subtext about race and class and all sorts of things. Heyes doesn't know how to direct any of it. He doesn't know how to direct his actors. Neville Brand—as Eleanor Parker's abusive husband—is simultaneously good and bad in the part.

The overbearing Jerry Goldsmith music doesn't help.

Parker and Hunter have their problems due to Heyes's direction, but they're effective. Parker's got a couple fantastic scenes.

Credits. Written and directed by Douglas Heyes; "The Chrysler Theatre" executive produced by Roy Huggins; music by Jerry Goldsmith; produced by Richard Berg; aired by the National Broadcasting Company. Starring Eleanor Parker (Fern Selman), Jeffrey Hunter (Gabe Flanders), Neville Brand (Sheriff Rufus Selman), James Anderson (Bert) and Bernie Hamilton (Joe).

Genre. Television.

Posted. 5 April 2015.

Weblink. <https://thestopbutton.com/2015/04/05/seven-miles-bad-road-1963/>.

Descriptors. Bernie Hamilton, Eleanor Parker, James Anderson, Jeffrey Hunter, Jerry Goldsmith, NBC, Neville Brand, Roy Huggins, Seven Miles of Bad Road.

Home video availability. None.



The Seventh Sin

1957, Ronald Neame



The Seventh Sin has three problems. The first is the third act; it's too rushed. Given the constraints of the film production—a shot-in-Hollywood production about a cholera outbreak in a rural Chinese town—there's not so much to be done about it. The film has a limited cast, especially once the action moves from Hong Kong to that town, and the roles are restrictive. The second problem is Miklós Rózsa's music. It's occasionally perfectly good melodramatic stuff, but Rózsa also has a lot what he must have considered Chinese themes. Regardless of their origin, they come off as trite or condescending and completely alien to the film's narrative. They're as patiently false as the rear screen projection shots, only without the actors there to get the scenes through.

The third problem is the big one. It keeps *The Seventh Sin* down, even when everything else is working (though, obviously, not much of Rózsa's score). "Leading man" Bill Travers is awful. He's mediocre at the start, seemingly unable to fully handle the part of a vindictive cuckold, but once he actually has some character development to essay? Travers butchers it even worse.

Now on to the good. Lead Eleanor Parker. She starts the film desperately unhappy, floundering, angry, and completely transforms through her experiences. *The Seventh Sin* is front-loaded. The most dramatic story stuff is at the beginning, when dull Travers learns Parker's having an affair with charming Jean-Pierre Aumont. By the time Travers drags Parker to the cholera outbreak, there's not much drama left. They're both resigned and burned out. Parker's already gone through one entire dramatic arc with the character and then she has to build another one, only without any outside incitement. Despite Travers

singlehandedly turning the tide of the cholera epidemic, *Sin's* all about how Parker experiences it and how that experience changes her. And a lot of her experience is just sitting around miserable.

Sometimes she does have George Sanders, playing an Englishman who's settled in the town to occasionally run an import and export business, but mostly to get drunk and snoop into people's personal lives. He finds a kindred spirit in Parker and much of the second act involve his attempts to discover her secrets and then what to do with those discoveries.

All of Parker's development comes in these quietly composed wide shots; she's often alone in them, negotiating her place in space. When someone else comes into the shot—specifically Travers—it's an intrusion. The subdued tension explodes. Parker argues magnificently in the film. The script never really gives Sanders a chance to keep up, which seems a missed opportunity (but not once the narrative plays out). At the beginning of the film, Travers actually does hold his ground for a moment or two but he quickly gets lost. It's impossible to imagine how *The Seventh Sin* would've turned out with a better performance in his role.

While Ronald Neame gets the sole credit, Vincente Minnelli directed much of it—most of it? And given Neame left because he (incredibly and stupidly) disliked Parker's performance, maybe Minnelli's responsible for all the great direction of Parker.

Besides Parker and Sanders (who plays a soulful drunk just like he's a soulful drunk), Aumont is pretty good. Françoise Rosay is excellent as a Mother Superior who gives Parker quite a bit of advice; it's mostly from a humanistic standpoint, not a religiously influenced one, which makes the scenes particularly effective.

Good black and white photography from Ray June. He does a lot better with the matte paintings than with the rear screen projection.

Karl Tunberg's script holds strong for almost the entire film, until the third act rush. That last minute stumble is mostly Tunberg's fault, but Minnelli (or Neame) could've tried to do something to save it. The finale manages to have Parker in every second but lose the character's depth. Her personal journey becomes perfunctory, which is a big problem given it's the entire picture.

And most of the picture is quite good.

Except Travers. Travers is terrible.

Credits. Directed by Ronald Neame; screenplay by Karl Tunberg, based on a novel by W. Somerset Maugham; director of photography, Ray June; edited by Gene Ruggiero; music by Miklos Rozsa; produced by David Lewis; released by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. Starring Eleanor Parker (Carol Carwin), Jean-Pierre Aumont (Paul Duvelle), George Sanders (Tim Waddington), Bill Travers (Doctor Walter Carwin), Françoise Rosay (Mother Superior) and Ellen Corby (Sister Saint Joseph).

Genre. Classics.

Posted. 1 September 2017.

Weblink. <https://thestopbutton.com/2017/09/01/seventh-sin-1957/>.

Descriptors. Bill Travers, David Lewis, Eleanor Parker, Ellen Corby, George Sanders, Jean-Pierre Aumont, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, The Seventh Sin, W. Somerset Maugham.

Home video availability. DVD.



The Seventh Sin

1957, Ronald Neame

★★½

If only it weren't for Bill Travers... his performance drags the film into the realm of absurdity. It isn't just his inability to act, it's also his utter lack of charisma. It's unbelievable anyone could like Travers the movie star (I'm thinking there must be or have been Victor Mature fans and George Raft fans, though I think Mature's probably a better actor than Raft or Travers), so his having a role in an MGM picture with so much merit otherwise is puzzling.

Travers's lack of a performance does everything it can to turn *The Seventh Sin* into a debacle, but it's not quite enough to overcome Eleanor Parker and George Sanders. The film's also well-paced at ninety-four minutes, but it's Sanders and Parker who really give the film life. There are some problems, therefore, with the plot, because it centers around Parker and Travers's broken marriage, except Travers is so bad, the real meat of the film is Parker's friendship with Sanders, which opens up in to her altruism for the Chinese orphans. *The Seventh Sin* would have also been immeasurably helped if Miklos Rozsa hadn't turned in an "Oriental" score. It's rather annoying.

Until the end, when the film gets cheap in its happy resolutions (I'm wondering if the cheapness comes from the Maugham novel or if it's a screenwriter's invention... my only other experience (in memory) with a Karl Tunberg script has been a bad one, so it was a pleasant surprise he provided a framework Sanders and Parker could excel in filling), it's a gradual, building experience about Parker. It's a little too eventful to be a character study, but it comes really close and, as such, provides her with a great role. The film is filled with easy contrivances her performance makes not only believable but good.

Without Sanders, however, the film would be that debacle. It's a perfect role for him—drunken, lecherous English businessman in China who is deeper than he appears—and it's an essential element to the film... *The Seventh Sin* is set in 1949 and, to some degree, it really resembles a 1949 handling of the story. The Westerners in the Orient genre had slowed down by the late 1950s and the film follows a lot of the genre standards. Sanders's character being one of those standards (as a comic foil, however, not as an actual character).

Unfortunately, Turner Classic Movies only plays a pan and scan print (IMDb has, in addition to lame user comments for the film, a seemingly incorrect aspect ratio of 2.35:1 listed... the titles are in 1.85:1 and the panning and scanning—and shot framing—suggest that aspect ratio), so it's hard to say for sure how well or how poorly Ronald Neame does composing... but it seems like he did a fine, mediocre job. He has a definite understanding of how to shoot to best utilize the actors (Sanders and Parker take an excellent walk), but it's not like he could have fixed Travers's performance.

As unappreciated as Parker is an actress, I imagine Sanders (even if he is in a number of famous films) is even more so and a film with them together, giving such great performances, is a nice find.

Credits. Directed by Ronald Neame; screenplay by Karl Tunberg, based on a novel by W. Somerset Maugham; director of photography, Ray June; edited by Gene Ruggiero; music by Miklos Rozsa; produced by David Lewis; released by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. Starring Eleanor Parker (Carol Carwin), Jean-Pierre Aumont (Paul Duvelle), George Sanders (Tim Waddington), Bill Travers (Doctor Walter Carwin), Françoise Rosay (Mother Superior) and Ellen Corby (Sister Saint Joseph).

Genre. Classics.

Posted. 16 October 2007.

Weblink. <https://thestopbutton.com/2007/10/16/the-seventh-sin-1957/>.

Descriptors. Bill Travers, David Lewis, Eleanor Parker, Ellen Corby, George Sanders, Jean-Pierre Aumont, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, *The Seventh Sin*, W. Somerset Maugham.

Home video availability. DVD.



She's Dressed to Kill

1979, Gus Trikonis

★½

She's Dressed to Kill is a simultaneously a perfect TV movie and a disappointment. It's a murder mystery set on an isolated mountain; Eleanor Parker is a recluse fashion designer who has a show and the attendees can't stop being murdered. Only the killer has followed the attendees, as the murdering starts before the fashion show.

The movie opens with top-billed John Rubinstein and Jessica Walter. She has the fashion agency, he's her photographer Friday. Rubinstein and Walter are really good together. She's good throughout, but George Lefferts's teleplay eighty-sixes her pretty quickly. Doesn't kill her, just ignores her. *Dressed* isn't good at character development. Rubinstein ends up romancing Gretchen Corbett to give him something to do and their courtship mostly consists of him telling her, "you don't have to be a model to be beautiful," and then treating her to an impromptu fashion shoot. It's a TV movie, sure, but it's on very precarious philosophical ground.

Especially given how much of the second act is spent with experienced model Joanna Cassidy trying to talk newbie Connie Sellecca out of modeling.

There are suspects aplenty but *Dressed* doesn't have a good solution to its mystery. Lefferts isn't writing a mystery so much as a thriller. It's engaging during viewing but it doesn't hold up on consideration. So, a perfect TV movie. It's ephemeral, without any further ambitions, which is a shame given the cast.

Parker has a great time as the fashion designer. She's playing it constantly hammered, with a lot of knowingly exaggerated tragedy. And Walters is great

when she's in it. Corbett's got a lousy part but she's good. Rubinstein's likable, until he gets grating. Banks is good. Cassidy tries. It doesn't work—director Trikonis doesn't direct his actors or for them—but she does try.

Speaking of trying, Sellecca is probably the movie's biggest misfire. She's incredibly shallow. Sellecca does try, but she's not good. She's got zero chemistry with the other actors and her part's annoying. And Peter Horton's pretty weak in a smaller suspect role too.

But *She's Dressed to Kill* definitely diverts for its runtime. I just wish it did something more. Being a completely competent television movie is one thing, but wasting the fine performances—Walter especially—is inexcusable.

Credits. Directed by Gus Trikonis; written by George Lefferts; director of photography, Thomas Del Ruth; edited by Ira Heymann; music by George Romanis; executive producers, Merrill Grant and Barry J. Weitz; aired by the National Broadcasting Company. Starring Connie Sellecca (Alix Goldman), John Rubinstein (Alan Lenz), Eleanor Parker (Regine Danton), Gretchen Corbett (Laura Gooch), Jessica Walter (Irene Barton), Jim McMullan (Sheriff Halsey), Clive Revill (Victor De Salle), Barbara Cason (Deenie Gooch), Cathie Shirriff (Kate Bedford), Corinne Calvet (Colette), Peter Horton (Tony Smith), Jonathan Banks (Rudy Striker) and Joanna Cassidy (Camille Bentancourt).

Genre. Television.

Posted. 27 June 2016.

Weblink. <https://thestopbutton.com/2016/06/27/shes-dressed-kill-1979/>.

Descriptors. Clive Revill, Connie Sellecca, Eleanor Parker, Jessica Walter, Joanna Cassidy, Jonathan Banks, NBC, Peter Horton, *She's Dressed to Kill*.

Home video availability. DVD.



Soldiers in White

1942, B. Reeves Eason

Not Recommended

Everett Dodd's editing makes *Soldiers in White* painful to watch. Some of the fault is director Eason's, of course. His insert close-ups are awful. Given *Soldiers* is half comedy and half Army propaganda film (the titular soldiers are Army doctors), it's hard to believe Eason was worried about running short and felt the need for more footage.

The narrative concerns William T. Orr as a whiny little intern who gets drafted. He harasses nurse Eleanor Parker and, once he's wounded, is inspired by fatherly John Litel to knock off the wisecre stuff and be an army doctor. Orr's real bad. I kept hoping the moral of the story was he'd get run over.

Parker manages to make Owen Crump's lame script seem good. Litel, who isn't bad, can't manage that feat.

Eason's direction is weak.

The short's tepid, of note only for Parker and Wilfred M. Cline's Technicolor photography.

Credits. Directed by B. Reeves Eason; written by Owen Crump; director of photography, Wilfred M. Cline; edited by Everett Dodd; released by Warner Bros. Starring William T. Orr (Pvt. Johnny Allison), Eleanor Parker (Lt. Paula Ryan) and John Litel (Maj. Charles Anthony).

Genre. Short.

Posted. 29 September 2011.

Weblink. <https://thestopbutton.com/2011/09/29/soldiers-white-1942/>.

Descriptors. B. Reeves Eason, Eleanor Parker, Everett Dodd, John Litel, Owen Crump, Soldiers in White, Warner Bros., Wilfred M. Cline, William T. Orr.

Home video availability. None.



The Sound of Music

1965, Robert Wise

★★★½

So much of *The Sound of Music* is exquisite, the film's got enough momentum to get over the rough spots. The film has three and a half distinct sections. There's the first, introducing Julie Andrews to the audience, then introducing Christopher Plummer and family to the Andrews and the audience, which then becomes about Andrews and the kids. The second part has Plummer returning after an absence, with Eleanor Parker and Richard Haydn along with him to give him something to do. Then there's the strange part following the intermission, which probably played better theatrically when one really did get up and leave the film for a period. When it returns—and Plummer and Andrews's romance takes off (at the expense of almost everything else)—the film is different.

Then the final part, with the Nazis out to capture Plummer, is entirely different. Unfortunately, director Wise is most ambitious in the setup of the film. He knows if he gets all the establishing stuff right—with Andrews, with Plummer and the kids—everything else will work out. The final part of the film with the family on the run is strong, but it's action. Wise is doing this action thriller. It works because his direction is good, Ted D. McCord's photography is glorious throughout, ditto William Reynolds's editing, and there are some amazing sets. And some good humor in Ernest Lehman's screenplay to lighten things appropriately.

This dramatic conclusion overshadows how briskly the film has changed itself. Andrews and Plummer are wonderful arguing and flirting, but their romance itself is tepid. Both of them get better scenes regarding it with Parker than they do with one another. And Wise doesn't take the time to progress that

part of the narrative organically when it comes to the kids, who are actual characters in the first hour of the film only to become likable accessories in the last hour.

The Sound of Music has a lot of things Wise has to get right in the first hour and he gets them, lots of things he has to establish so he can lean upon them later. It's fine, but it's never as good later on, whether with returning characters or song encores. The handling of the songs in the first hour and a half are glorious. Once intermission hits, Wise is in a rush and the film suffers. There's so many great stagings in the first part—down to using an adorable puppet show to get in another song—the remainder, with far fewer group songs and instead questionable duets, can't measure up.

Still, Wise has got all the right pieces. Plummer and Andrews, even when they don't have much to do, are great doing it. There's also Ben Wright's odious villain, who Wise and Lehman had been foreshadowing (but not enough). *The Sound of Music* gets through the choppy waters to succeed. It just could've been better.

Credits. Produced and directed by Robert Wise; screenplay by Ernest Lehman, based on the stage musical book by Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse and ideas by George Hurdalek; director of photography, Ted D. McCord; edited by William Reynolds; music by Irwin Kostal; production designer, Boris Leven; released by 20th Century Fox. Starring Julie Andrews (Maria), Christopher Plummer (Captain Von Trapp), Richard Haydn (Max Detweiler), Peggy Wood (Mother Abbess), Anna Lee (Sister Margaretta), Portia Nelson (Sister Berthe), Ben Wright (Herr Zeller), Daniel Truhitte (Rolfe), Norma Varden (Frau Schmidt), Marni Nixon (Sister Sophia), Gilchrist Stuart (Franz), Evadne Baker (Sister Bernice), Doris Lloyd (Baroness Ebberfeld), Charmian Carr (Liesl), Nicholas Hammond (Friedrich), Heather Menzies-Urich (Louisa), Duane Chase (Kurt), Angela Cartwright (Brigitta), Debbie Turner (Marta), Kym Karath (Gretl) and Eleanor Parker (The Baroness).

Genre. Musical.

Posted. 27 November 2015.

Weblink. <https://thestopbutton.com/2015/11/27/sound-music-1965/>.

Descriptors. 20th Century Fox, Angela Cartwright, Charmian Carr, Christopher Plummer, Eleanor Parker, Julie Andrews, Kym Karath, Nicholas Hammond, The Sound of Music.

Home video availability. DVD, Blu-ray, streaming.



Sunburn

1979, Richard C. Sarafian



Sunburn is a Farrah Fawcett star vehicle. It's really Charles Grodin's movie for the most part, but it's Farrah Fawcett's vehicle. She can be down home, she can be glamorous, she can be faithful when playing Grodin's fake wife (which Grodin can't), she can be adventurous, she can be dumb, she can be smart, she can be scantily clad, she can be topless in bed but with her back turned. Because sometimes *Sunburn* is all about the male gaze. Sometimes it's all about gentle comedy. Sometimes it's bad car chases. Sometimes it's about puppies.

In addition to Grodin and Fawcett, Art Carney rounds out the lead characters. Grodin's an insurance investigator, Fawcett is his presumable local model fake wife (he calls an agency to hire her and it's made clear it isn't an escort agency), Carney is the local P.I. buddy of Grodin. Carney's got some cred, but *Sunburn* is boiling over with credibility cameos. There's Keenan Wynn, Eleanor Parker, John Hillerman. Wynn is in one scene and has like two lines. Parker doesn't even get a close-up. She's the widow of the case and Grodin never gets around to interviewing her. Hillerman has a couple scenes and no character. William Daniels at least has some personality.

But then there's Joan Collins. And she's awesome. She's got the promiscuous, unhappy older rich married lady part. "She must be forty!" Fawcett tells Grodin at one point, hoping to dissuade his interest without appearing jealous. Because *Sunburn* is nothing if not a product of its time. Three screenwriters—James Booth, Stephen Oliver, producer John Daly—and the best acted moments in the film are when Grodin and Carney are mugging it for the camera. Seriously. Carney sort of assumes the space in the film Collins does in the first act or so.

It's unfortunate. Collins is a lot more fun. Carney is cute, but it's a nothing part. Collins has a nothing part and goes wild with it.

Shame Sarafian can't direct it. He can't direct any of it. He goes from mediocre to bad to worse. Geoffrey Foot's editing is awful, but it's obviously a lack of available footage. Sarafian can't figure out how to direct any of it. Not interiors, especially not exteriors, not his actors, not action, nothing. In the second half, once the investigation is going full steam, there's almost some attempts at style, but Foot's editing ruins it.

Álex Phillips Jr.'s photography is solid. Acapulco looks nice. John Cameron's poppy score is preferable to the top 40's soundtrack, which actually is part of the story—Fawcett is always playing cassettes on her portable player.

Grodin's occasionally got moments. Not many, not great ones, but some. He's able to survive *Sunburn*. He's doing his thing, he's doing it turned up to eleven, and he's able to get through.

As for Fawcett, after a slightly promising start, she gets a terrible arc for a star vehicle and there's only so much her likability can get through. The film lays on a lot of backstory to get sympathy, along with a clumsiness subplot it immediately drops, but it's all show. There aren't any real scenes between her and Grodin, just exposition—which is initially fine because of their awkward bantering—and when she makes her second act transition to intrepid, scantily clad adventurer, there's just no support for it. *Sunburn* stops pretending it's going to give Fawcett anything to do.

The cast of *Sunburn* is strong enough to do this thing. It's a noir spoof, or should be. Sarafian can't do it, the script can't do it. The actors could. Collins sort of does.

Oh, and the non-credibility cameo stars. Robin Clarke, Joan Goodfellow, Jack Kruschen, Alejandro Rey. Alejandro Rey is awesome. Robin Clarke tries really, really, really, really hard. And he sucks. Goodfellow's bad but likable. Kruschen needed to be the best credibility cameo. *Sunburn*'s Mr. Big needs to be someone formidable, because there is actual danger.

So, an interesting film to dissect given its motives, but it's dramatically inert due to technical incompetence.

Credits. Directed by Richard C. Sarafian; screenplay by James Booth, John Daly, and Stephen Oliver, based on a novel by Stanley Ellin; director of photography, Álex Phillips Jr.; edited by Geoffrey Foot; music by John Cameron; production designer, Ted Tester; produced by Daly and Gerald Green; released by

Paramount Pictures. Starring Farrah Fawcett (Ellie), Charles Grodin (Jake), Art Carney (Al), Joan Collins (Nera), Alejandro Rey (Fons), Robin Clarke (Karl), Joan Goodfellow (Joanna), Eleanor Parker (Mrs. Thoren), John Hillerman (Webb), William Daniels (Crawford), Keenan Wynn (Mark Elmes), Jack Kruschen (Gela), and Seymour Cassel (Dobbs).

Genre. Comedy.

Posted. 19 February 2017.

Weblink. <https://thestopbutton.com/2017/02/19/sunburn-1979/>.

Descriptors. Charles Grodin, Eleanor Parker, Farrah Fawcett, Gerald Green, Joan Collins, John Daly, Paramount Pictures, Sunburn, William Daniels.

Home video availability. DVD (R2).



Three Secrets 1950, Robert Wise



Three Secrets plays like a knock-off of *A Letter to Three Wives*, only without the writing. *Secrets*'s problem is mostly with the writing. There are the three women—all of whom have secrets, except actually only two of them—played by Eleanor Parker, Patricia Neal, and Ruth Roman. The secret is each put a child up for adoption (on the same day) and now the child might be alone on top of a mountain, following a plane crash killing his adoptive parents. The kid's turning six on the day of the present action, so there are three flashbacks to the women's past—except only two of them tie together, which leaves the third—Ruth Roman's—sticking out, just like her character sticks out. She's particularly mistreated by the film, sort of disregarded, and if director Robert Wise had properly configured the film, she'd be even smaller (and maybe not played by Ruth Roman, who's good, but deserves a better role). Properly, *Three Secrets* would juxtapose Eleanor Parker and Patricia Neal. Parker's got a husband (not the baby's father), a loving but overbearing mother, and she can't have kids anymore (which the husband doesn't know, so maybe that secret's the third one, since Roman doesn't have a secret). Neal's a successful journalist whose career got in the way of her marriage. Had the film been about Neal becoming her own story and Parker's conflicts with her mother and so on, *Three Secrets* might have been something better.

It wouldn't have been great, however, since Wise doesn't know what to do without a big budget. *Three Secrets* is visibly cheaper—lots of backdrops standing in for nature, lots of indoor shooting—and Wise doesn't do anything interesting to make the film visually dynamic. He shoots it straight and unimaginatively. For film buffs, there is a sequence in *Three Secrets* Wise later did again in *The*

Andromeda Strain. The film does show a pulse—when Parker’s family conflicts are off-screen—once some reporters show up. It’s a great newspaper or radio movie, but it’s not supposed to be about the journalists, it’s supposed to be about the three women. When they get together at the end, for maybe fifteen minutes, the scenes are good. Neal’s the central character and she’s good with both Parker and Roman, but she’s so level-headed throughout, the other two women have a couple nice moments the film should have expanded on. The most interesting part of the present action would have been the three women sitting around worried, but we only get a few minutes of it.

The acting from the three women is all good. Depending on the scene, Parker or Neal is better. The supporting cast is mostly in the flashbacks and of that cast, Ted de Corsia is good. In the present action, Edmon Ryan as a rival reporter and Katherine Warren as Parker’s mother are both excellent.

Three Secrets takes place over a nerve-racking thirty-two hours and it never gives the audience a single moment of dread. Everything is positively resolved for everyone, which is fine enough, but it happens immediately. There isn’t even the pretense of anyone thinking or considering their life-changing decisions. The film needed to be written as a play, just to get the pacing right, then filmed. As it stands, it has some good acting and some strange directorial choices.

Credits. Directed by Robert Wise; written by Martin Rackin and Gina Kaus; director of photography, Sidney Hickox; edited by Thomas Reilly; music by David Buttolph; produced by Milton Sperling; released by Warner Bros. Starring Eleanor Parker (Susan Adele Connors Chase), Patricia Neal (Phyllis Horn), Ruth Roman (Ann Lawrence), Frank Lovejoy (Bob Duffy), Leif Erickson (Bill Chase), Ted de Corsia (Del Prince), Edmon Ryan (Hardin), Larry Keating (Mark Harrison), Katherine Warren (Mrs. Connors) and Arthur Franz (Paul Radin).

Genre. Classics.

Posted. 26 July 2006.

Weblink. <https://thestopbutton.com/2006/07/26/three-secrets-1950/>.

Descriptors. Eleanor Parker, Frank Lovejoy, Larry Keating, Leif Erickson, Patricia Neal, Robert Wise, Ruth Roman, Three Secrets, Warner Bros.

Home video availability. DVD, Blu-ray.



The Tiger and the Pussycat

1967, Dino Risi

The Tiger and the Pussycat tells the sad tale of forty-five year-old businessman, Vittorio Gassman. He's just become a grandfather. His college-age son wants to have long hair. All of his wife's friends are abandoned women; their husbands have run off with younger women. Gassman is dissatisfied. Upon finding his son attempting suicide over a girl (Ann-Margret), Gassman lets the girl seduce him. Him Gassman, not the son.

Hilarity ensues.

Or not.

Mostly it's just Gassman being a different kind of jerk to people. Initially, he's a successful jerk—*The Tiger*—but once Ann-Margret shows up, he's putty.

The Tiger and the Pussycat runs just over one hundred minutes. It's never particularly good, never promising. Even though Alessandro D'Eva's photography is fine, spectacular on occasion, and Marcello Malvestito's editing is nice, director Risi is so boring there's never anything to get excited about. Except maybe in comparing how Risi's male gaze on either tightly or scantily clad Ann-Margret has less enthusiasm than his male gaze on Eleanor Parker (as Gassman's suffering wife) and her similarly aged friends. At one point, Ann-Margret's mother has to console Gassman and the film had the closest flirtation with chemistry ever.

But no. Because while Gassman is a caricature, he's at least an active one. He has some unfortunate slapstick attempts, but otherwise it's a perfectly fine performance. He's trapped by the lame script and lame composition, just like the

viewer.

Ann-Margret's bad. Parker's okay; her part's terrible, but she's okay. Fiorenzo Fiorentini is cute as Gassman's sidekick (the film barely has a supporting cast—Gassman's the whole show). He carried on with a young woman and ruined his life. The script's constantly setting up comical examples of why Gassman ought to get serious. That aforementioned "hilarity" ensues after he doesn't acknowledge any of them.

The film gets a little bit worse at the end, which is sort of too bad because if it had just not gone on and on and on and on in the second half, it might have at least been tolerable. Instead, it's Risi wasting his cast, Gassman giving a decent enough performance will suffocated by a bad script and a disinterested director, Parker not even having enough material to turn her part into a role, and Ann-Margret being annoying. Yes, the script fails her too—and Risi's direction of her—but she's still not good in *Tiger and the Pussycat*. She's just not.

Credits. Directed by Dino Risi; screenplay by John O. Douglas, Agnere Incrocci, and Furio Scarpelli, based on a story by Risi, Incrocci, and Scarpelli; director of photography, Alessandro D'Eva; edited by Marcello Malvestito; music by Fred Bongusto; production designer, Luciano Ricceri; produced by Mario Cecchi Gori; released by Titanus. Starring Vittorio Gassman (Francesco Vincenzini), Ann-Margret (Carolina), Eleanor Parker (Esperia Vincenzini), Fiorenzo Fiorentini (Tazio), Antonella Steni (Pinella), and Luigi Vannucchi (Company president).

Genre. Comedy.

Posted. 31 December 2016.

Weblink. <https://thestopbutton.com/2016/12/31/il-tigre-1967/>.

Descriptors. Ann-Margret, Antonella Steni, Dino Risi, Eleanor Parker, Fred Bongusto, Luigi Vannucchi, The Tiger and the Pussycat, Titanus, Vittorio Gassman.

Home video availability. DVD.



Valentino

1951, Lewis Allen

Valentino opens with lead Anthony Dexter (whose resemblance to Valentino got him the job, not his acting abilities) doing the tango. It's the troupe's rehearsal and it's fine. It's not concerning, which is sort of cool for the film, because most of the scenes are concerning. George Bruce's screenplay—based on his own story, "Valentino As I Knew Him"—ranges from tepid to cringe-worthy. Lewis Allen's direction of that screenplay is never better than in this first scene. It's as good, but it's also much worse.

So when *Valentino* approaches mediocre, it's to be appreciated. And you know early on, because the third scene—where Dexter quits the dance troupe because boss Dona Drake wants him to be hers alone. Not all women's. Drake's performance is terrible but her role is terrible and hackneyed. Allen doesn't care. It's kind of stunning to watch this beautifully rendered Technicolor—Harry Stradling Sr.'s photography is only workman because Allen never asks him to do anything else (or takes him off set)—with this constantly misfiring production.

Bruce's script either has Dexter playing Lothario or Great Lover, often to the same character. It might keep the character's true intentions secret if Dexter didn't give a spellbindingly awful performance. He kind of makes it through the first act, mostly because Eleanor Parker is on hand to hold the movie up, but once Dexter's on his own... it gets real bad. A lot of it is Allen. He's not trying at all with his composition. He has this one shot he uses for Richard Carlson's close-ups over and over again. Carlson's thanklessly playing clueless cuckold—Parker's beau and Dexter's best friend and both their boss. He's a movie director.

Through the first act, Parker has this character to play. She's a fictional silent

era star—Allen’s real bad at rendering the silent era stuff, though it’s not clear *Valentino* had the budget to get the scenes done. The cheapness is another problem. Once Dexter arrives in New York City and it’s a backlot set of a town square? Well, segueing back to Parker, at least they didn’t cheap on her wardrobe. She’s beyond glamorous.

Unfortunately, other than the gowns, Parker ends up with nothing. *Valentino* makes some promises to its female stars—top-billed Parker and third-billed Patricia Medina—they’re supposed to be Dexter’s great loves. Parker makes it work until the script’s just too silly; she and Carlson also have zero chemistry together as creative partners, much less romantic ones. But it’s the script (and Allen) more than the actors. Medina has this somewhat interesting role as Dexter and Parker’s confidant who Dexter cravenly romances.

Valentino has a really small cast of characters who all are in the movie business and none of them have friends outside each other. There’s familiar chemistry between the actors—all of them—except it’s up to Parker and Medina to hold up Dexter. Parker at least gets to have a full character arc, albeit a terrible, thoughtless one, but not Medina. She’s completely disposable once her function is executed.

Everything in *Valentino* is purely functional, with the exception of Joseph Calleia’s throwaway comic relief lines. Calleia should have the best part in the movie. He’s Dexter’s down-to-earth confidant and business manager. They’re paisanos. Bruce is big on the authentic dialogue.

But Calleia’s got a crap part. He’s there to prop up Dexter too. Only the writing is a lot less compelling, which is a surprise how boring Bruce can go with this script, and Calleia can’t do it. The material isn’t there. Allen isn’t there. And, somehow, *Valentino* actually manages to get worse.

When Parker does come back, she’s in a different role—she’s subject, not lead. The film introduces Lloyd Gough as a reporter who’s on to Dexter. The last third turns out to be he and Dexter’s showdown over the Valentino brand. Initially, Gough’s a welcome surprise just because he’s different. Turns out you can be different and bad. *Valentino* has a lot of different bad things about it. Except the Technicolor and Parker’s wardrobe, there’s nothing to recommend it.

Credits. Directed by Lewis Allen; screenplay by George Bruce, based on his story, “Valentino As I Knew Him;” director of photography, Harry Stradling Sr.; edited by Daniel Mandell; music by Heinz Roemheld; produced by Edward Small; released by Columbia Pictures. Starring Eleanor Parker (Joan Carlisle), Richard Carlson (Bill King), Patricia Medina (Lila Reyes), Joseph Calleia (Luigi Verducci), Dona

Drake (Maria Torres), Lloyd Gough (Eddie Morgan), Otto Kruger (Mark Towers), and introducing Anthony Dexter (Rudolph Valentino).

Genre. Classics.

Posted. 19 May 2017.

Weblink. <https://thestopbutton.com/2017/05/19/valentino-1951/>.

Descriptors. Columbia Pictures, Dona Drake, Eleanor Parker, Joseph Calleia, Lewis Allen, Otto Kruger, Patricia Medina, Richard Carlson, Valentino.

Home video availability. None.



Valley of the Kings 1954, Robert Pirosh



Eighty-six minute movies are not supposed to be boring. Eighty-six minute sound films anyway. *Valley of the Kings* manages to be boring in the first twelve minutes. Even those twelve minutes are boring. It takes the film until just over the halfway point to actually get moving. Not interesting, not good, but moving. There are three action scenes back-to-back—a sandstorm, a Bedouin duel, and a fist-fight atop a giant Egyptian statue. The film tries to start with action too—a buggy chase within the first six minutes, but chases are hard enough to do in cars, much less buggies.

Valley of the Kings was filmed on location in Egypt, so I imagine those visuals were much of the prospective appeal, but the writing's bad—in multiple ways—and the director doesn't know how to make the visuals work for the film. They're background instead of attraction and the film still tries to replace content with them. At eighty-six minutes, it's hard for a film to take much responsibility—and *Valley of the Kings* tells the story of the archeological proof of Joseph in Egypt (something archeology has yet to prove), and it's a deep subject. A lot has to go on... and nothing goes on in *Valley of the Kings*. It tries to be a few films—one about this search for evidence, another about adulterous relationship, and yet another (action-filled one) of grave-robbing intrigue. In the end, it doesn't any of these subjects seriously and there's little to hold together....

...except, of course, the locations—which are excellent in the second half—and Robert Taylor. *Valley of the Kings* is Taylor and Eleanor Parker's second of three films together (for MGM). Their first, *Above and Beyond*, was great. This one

manages to waste Parker by changing her character in the third act (she becomes positively unlovable in the last three scenes, then the film expects the audience to embrace her). She has a cuckold, played by Carlos Thompson (who I've never seen in anything else, much to my glee)... but the opening credits tell us the film stars Taylor and Parker. Taylor is getting the girl, so there aren't many surprises once it gets going. Taylor is great in the film and would have been even better had to been serious film about archeology or adulterous affairs.

The film has a lot respect for the Muslim characters it portrays, much more respect than they get today in films—even in culturally sensitive films. It's a reasonably important footnote in the history of American perspective of Muslims (Islamic fundamentalism hadn't come around yet) and they're treated with more respect than the European character, who's a big shithead.

Valley of the Kings isn't terrible thanks to the second half, but Robert Pirosh is a bad writer and a bad director. Of the two problems, the writing hurts the film most. With a good script and another twenty minutes, *Valley of the Kings* would... still not be as good as *Above and Beyond*, but it wouldn't be so middling.

Credits. Directed by Robert Pirosh; screenplay by Pirosh and Karl Tunberg, from a book by C.W. Ceram; director of photography, Robert Surtees; edited by Harold F. Kress; music by Miklos Rozsa; released by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. Starring Robert Taylor (Mark Brandon), Eleanor Parker (Ann Barclay Mercedes), Carlos Thompson (Philip Mercedes), Kurt Kaszner (Hamed Backhour), Victor Jory (Taureg Chief), Leon Askin (Valentine Arko, Antique Dealer) and Aldo Silvani (Father Anthimos).

Genre. Classics.

Posted. 11 April 2006.

Weblink. <https://thestopbutton.com/2006/04/11/valley-of-the-kings-1954/>.

Descriptors. Carlos Thompson, Eleanor Parker, Kurt Kaszner, Leon Askin, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, Miklos Rozsa, Robert Taylor, Valley of the Kings, Victor Jory.

Home video availability. DVD.



Vanished

1971, Buzz Kulik

Even for a TV miniseries, *Vanished* feels like it runs too long. There are always tedious subplots, like folksy, pervy old man senator Robert Young plotting against President Richard Widmark. Widmark is up for re-election and he's vulnerable. Even his own press secretary's secretary (Skye Aubrey) thinks Widmark is "an evil man," possibly because he's going to end the world in nuclear war, possibly because he's a secretive boss. It's never clear. Aubrey, both her character and her performance, are the most tedious thing about *Vanished* until she, well, vanishes. A lot of characters just vanish. After meticulous plotting, Dean Riesner's teleplay throws it all out after the resolution to the first part "cliffhanger."

The setup for *Vanished* is probably the best stuff it has going for it. At the beginning, it all seems like it's going to be about that press secretary—James Farentino—who's new to job and dating his secretary (Aubrey). He's got an FBI agent roommate (Robert Hooks) and spends his time at happening parties with friends while avoiding reporter William Shatner's intrusive questions. There's also a significant subplot involving Widmark's best friend, civilian Arthur Hill, who's an active older American. He and Eleanor Parker as his wife are great together. For their one scene. Because then Hill goes missing—he's *Vanished*, you see—it's up to Farentino and Hooks, unofficially working the case, to track him down.

While avoiding Shatner's intrusions and Aubrey's annoying behavior.

And Riesner—and director Kulik—manage to make Farentino's a believable amateur detective. The plotting helps out with it, as does Widmark's

mysteriousness. Shatner's not very good in *Vanished*, mostly just broadly thin, but he's a decent enough adversary for Farentino. Eventually, Widmark's part grows and he too gets an adversary. CIA head E.G. Marshall thinks Widmark's keeping too much from him and gets involved with Young's scheming senator.

Marshall's so good at playing slime bag, especially the quiet, unassuming one here, those scenes pass fairly well. Farentino's decent, Hooks's good, Widmark's fine. Aubrey's bad. And no one is anywhere near as compelling as Hill and Parker, or even Farentino before he just becomes an exposition tool. Maybe if *Vanished* kept him around in the last hour, except for awful bickering scenes with Aubrey, it'd have finished better. Instead, after dragging out the first couple hours—including a pointless excursion to Brazil for Hooks—Farentino vanishes too. Parker goes somewhere towards the end of the first hour, Hooks somewhere towards the end of the second, Farentino in the third. At least in Hooks's case, it's so Reisner can perturb the plot. But Farentino just stops being interesting.

And the interesting thing is supposed to be the reveal, which is way too obvious towards the end of the first half of *Vanished*. Reisner doesn't have anything to do with it (presumably) as he's just adapting a novel. Instead of spreading it all out, however, *Vanished* would do much better, much shorter. It still wouldn't fix the stupid resolution, which comes during a lot of reused footage for the "action" sequences, but at least shorter there'd be less time investment.

Because Reisner and Kulik don't answer the most interesting questions. The film skips any number of good scenes to "go big" with stock footage of aircraft carrier take-offs. There's also a lot of grand, "real world" spy technology in the second half, which is a waste of time. Well, unless Kulik had made it visually interesting, but he doesn't.

Vanished is a disappointment, but one with mostly solid (or better) acting. Nice small turns from Murray Hamilton, Larry Hagman, Don Pedro Colley; plus a really funny single scene one from Neil Hamilton.

Maybe if Farentino and Hooks weren't such appealing leads—or if Hill and Parker didn't imply they'd be able to do great scenes together—*Vanished* wouldn't disappoint so much. But it even fails Widmark; after intentionally obfuscating him for over two and a half hours, *Vanished* wants the viewer to rest their emotional weight on him.

Vanished is reasonably tolerable throughout, just not adding up to anything,

until the bungled reveal sinks it.

Credits. Directed by Buzz Kulik; teleplay by Dean Riesner, based on the novel by Fletcher Knebel; director of photography, Lionel Lindon; edited by Robert Watts; music by Leonard Rosenman; produced by David J. O'Connell; aired by the National Broadcasting Company. Starring James Farentino (Gene Culligan), Richard Widmark (President Paul Roudebush), E.G. Marshall (Arthur Ingram), Robert Hooks (Larry Storm), Eleanor Parker (Sue Greer), Arthur Hill (Arnold Greer), Skye Aubrey (Jill Nichols), William Shatner (Dave Paulick), Murray Hamilton (Nick McCann), Tom Bosley (Johnny Cavanaugh), Larry Hagman (Jerry Freytag), Denny Miller (Big Bubba Toubou), Don Pedro Colley (Mercurio), and Robert Young (Senator Earl Gannon).

Genre. Television.

Posted. 23 June 2017.

Weblink. <https://thestopbutton.com/2017/06/23/vanished-1971/>.

Descriptors. Eleanor Parker, Larry Hagman, Murray Hamilton, NBC, Richard Widmark, Robert Young, Tom Bosley, Vanished, William Shatner.

Home video availability. None.



The Very Thought of You **1944, Delmer Daves**



Delmer Daves—for someone whose directing occasionally makes me cover my eyes in fright—does an all right job with *The Very Thought of You*. He has these tight close-ups and, while there are only a few of them, they work out quick well. Otherwise, technically speaking, he doesn't have many tricks. He's on the low end of proficient and I kept thinking, as I watched the film, what a better director could have done with the material, since the film's so strong.

There isn't much internal conflict in *The Very Thought of You*. World War II applies pressure on the characters, pushing them into conflicted situations, which gives the film a nice lightness. It gets slow occasionally, since the only foreseeable suspense throughout is Dennis Morgan's character getting killed in battle—except he and Eleanor Parker have multiple goodbyes, only to get to see each other again before he goes off. The first act is loaded with good scenes and great conversations and, while the second doesn't have as many, it has enough the pacing doesn't get too bothersome.

I suppose the film is propaganda, but it's incredibly light propaganda if it is—a shot here or there, an extra line of dialogue. Morgan looks like a leading man, but he's probably the weakest actor in the film. I've seen it before but didn't remember much and I was worried he'd be expected to carry it. Instead, Parker's got an awful family—Beulah Bondi and Andrea King remind of wicked characters from a fairy tale and both are excellent. Obviously, Parker needs some support in the family scenes, so Henry Travers is her understanding father and does some nice work. Georgia Lee Settle is her precocious little sister and she's good too. The 4F brother, played by John Alvin, also does some good work. The

family scenes are most of the best written ones, since they have visible conflict. The other good scenes are the ones with Parker and Faye Emerson and the ones with Dane Clark as the comic relief (with a heart of gold). The romance between Morgan and Parker—the majority of the film takes place over two days—has all off-screen conflict and, though it's the subject of the film, one just takes it for granted and engages with the rest.

The film is well-made (though there's mediocre direction—with a few exceptions) and it's nice and a pleasant viewing experience. Still, without any conflict and any real suspense, it's a chore to maintain interest. It's rewarding, but still a chore.

Credits. Directed by Delmer Daves; screenplay by Alvah Bessie and Daves, from a story by Lionel Wiggam; director of photography, Bert Glennon; edited by Alan Crosland Jr.; music by Franz Waxman; produced by Jerry Wald; released by Warner Bros. Starring Dennis Morgan (Sgt. David Stewart), Eleanor Parker (Janet Wheeler), Dane Clark (Sgt. 'Fixit' Gilman), Faye Emerson (Cora 'Cuddles' Colton), Beulah Bondi (Mrs. Harriet Wheeler), Henry Travers (Pop Wheeler), William Prince (Fred), Andrea King (Molly Wheeler), John Alvin (Cal Wheeler), Marianne O'Brien (Bernice), Georgia Lee Settle (Ellie Wheeler), Richard Erdman (Soda Jerk) and Francis Pierlot (Minister Raymond Houck).

Genre. Classics.

Posted. 22 July 2006.

Weblink. <https://thestopbutton.com/2006/07/22/the-very-thought-of-you-1944/>.

Descriptors. Beulah Bondi, Dane Clark, Dennis Morgan, Eleanor Parker, Faye Emerson, Henry Travers, John Alvin, The Very Thought of You, Warner Bros., William Prince.

Home video availability. None.



The Voice of the Turtle

1947, Irving Rapper



The Voice of the Turtle runs an hour and forty minutes. There's a split about forty minutes in and, in the second hour, leads Eleanor Parker and Ronald Reagan are playing slightly different characters. Screenwriter John Van Druten adapted his play (with additional dialogue from Charles Hoffman) and had to "clean things up." The play was very controversial on release in 1943, dealing with affairs and sexual desire and the like; the movie's sanitized. There's one shockingly direct mention but it goes by so fast, it's like it never happened. And then there's a clothing malfunction scene, which seems risqué, but isn't explored. Maybe it was a big moment in the play and they wanted to keep it?

A faithful adaptation of the play is, frankly, unimaginable with the cast and production of the film. *Voice of the Turtle* plays like a strange attempt at big budget slapstick. The production values are mostly great. The sets, the backlot street scenes. The frequent projection composites, transporting Reagan and Parker to New York City locations, don't come off. But Sol Polito's photography is nice regardless. And Rapper isn't a bad director. He does really well when *Turtle* isn't in its "stage setting," Parker's apartment. Once they're in the apartment, Rapper directs everything like it's funny, even when it's not. Nothing when it shouldn't be, but the script introduces Parker's eccentric neatness tendencies (way too late) and Rapper seems to think it's the best physical comedy ever.

It's not. It's not even funny. In the context of the narrative, given how upset Parker is during some of the sequences, it'd be insensitive if Rapper weren't generally oblivious with how to direct the apartment sequences. Reagan and

Parker share sad faces, hugs, kisses, and comic setpieces. Everything comes off contrived, which Reagan and Parker help counteract.

Second-billed Parker is the lead. Reagan only gets one real scene to himself—a walk in front of a projection of Central Park—but neither of them gets much to do. Parker gets more because she’s also got this subplot involving getting a role with a lecherous middle-aged actor and being oblivious. It’s diverting, because Parker playing a solvent but unsuccessful actress is interesting, while her being sad over scummy ex-boyfriend Kent Smith dumping her isn’t interesting. For the first forty, Parker never get to lead a scene, she’s always playing backup to Smith, Eve Arden, or Reagan. But the first forty minutes are somehow more successful, just due to lack of ambition. It’s a comedy of errors.

Sure, the errors involve Arden dumping visiting soldier Reagan because a better prospect is in town (Wayne Morris) and Parker getting stuck entertaining him, but it doesn’t feel like it’s trying to be risqué. Arden gives it the right amount of wink and Parker plays along.

Parker’s good. She never has a particularly great moment. The third act is particularly rough, with Reagan getting better stuff to do. Parker just gets to clean. One can only imagine how good she would’ve been in the play.

Reagan’s likable without ever being particularly appealing. He does slightly better with romantic sincerity than he does with the initially jilted booty call. He has no sense of comic timing, which doesn’t end up hurting the film since Rapper doesn’t have any either.

The supporting cast is either fine or negligible enough not to make a difference. Arden’s fine—she’s good in the first twenty, but the script turns her into a caricature (as far as dialogue, maybe not intention) for the last hour. It’s too bad. Morris is a little too absurd. Smith doesn’t have his full part—in the play, he’s married and Parker’s his mistress; in the movie, he’s just a moustached jerk. Still, if he did have more of a part, Smith probably wouldn’t be able to handle it. He’s doltish.

John Emery has an awesome scene. It probably would’ve been great if he and Parker could have implied premarital sex existed, but instead, it’s just fun.

Max Steiner’s score is way too much. He goes overboard trying to give the romance some melodramatic musical flare, amping it up to the point it comes off inappropriate. It’s too much, given how lightly Rapper and the script approach

things.

The Voice of the Turtle is charming thanks to its leads and the nice production values. Knowing about the play explains many incongruities, but doesn't excuse Rapper, Van Druten, and Hoffman's failures to fix them. With Parker, Reagan, and Arden, it wouldn't have been hard to produce a solid, innocuous, slight comedy.

Credits. Directed by Irving Rapper; screenplay by John Van Druten and Charles Hoffman, based on the play by Van Druten; director of photography, Sol Polito; edited by Rudi Fehr; music by Max Steiner; produced by Hoffman; released by Warner Bros. Starring Eleanor Parker (Sally Middleton), Ronald Reagan (Sergeant Bill Page), Eve Arden (Olive Lashbrooke), Kent Smith (Kenneth Bartlett), Wayne Morris (Comm. Ned Burling), John Emery (George Harrington), and John Holland (Henry Atherton).

Genre. Classics.

Posted. 15 September 2017.

Weblink. <https://thestopbutton.com/2017/09/15/voice-turtle-1947/>.

Descriptors. Charlie Hoffman, Eleanor Parker, Eve Arden, John Holland, Max Steiner, Ronald Reagan, *The Voice of the Turtle*, Warner Bros., Wayne Morris.

Home video availability. DVD.



Warning Shot

1967, Buzz Kulik



Warning Shot is almost successful. For most of the film, director Kulik and screenwriter Mann Rubin craft an engaging mystery. Then the third act happens and they both employ cheap tricks and it knocks the film off course. It's a rather short third act too—the film's got a peculiar structure, probably to allow for all the cameos—and it just falls apart. What's worse is the plot was already meandering (and promised more meandering) by that point.

David Janssen is a cop about to go to trial for killing an upstanding doctor. He's got to prove himself innocent—or the doctor dirty—which means he visits various people. The first act—with Ed Begley as his boss, Keenan Wynn as his partner, Sam Wanamaker as the DA out to get him and Carroll O'Connor as the hispanic coroner—is completely different than the rest of the film. Kulik uses cockeyed angles, which Joseph F. Biroc shoots beautifully (though he doesn't do as well with the hand-held look Kulik goes for in other early scenes). It makes all the exposition sail. The angles and the actors. The actors are very important.

There's only one weak performance in *Warning Shot*—Joan Collins as Janssen's estranged wife—all the rest are good or better. Even when it's a single scene like Eleanor Parker or George Sanders. Parker's better, she's got a lot more to do than sit behind a desk and be a snot, which Sanders accomplishes admirably. George Grizzard is solid as Janssen's newfound ally and Stefanie Powers is great as the dead doctor's nurse. Lillian Gish has a small part as a witness and she's a lot of fun. Begley, Wynn and especially Wanamaker are all strong. Carroll O'Connor as the—wait for it—Hispanic coroner is a little weird, but he's not bad, just Carroll O'Connor playing a Mexican.

There's a lot going on in the story for the first half of the film; the second half doesn't have much material as far as the mystery, but it does have material for the supporting cast. They work at it and Janssen's a phenomenally sturdy lead. He's able to sell everything, from drinking buttermilk as a vice to fending off a seductive Collins. Bad performance or not, the latter seems unlikely.

I suppose the somewhat lengthy slide into troubled mystery waters is a bonus. It makes *Warning Shot* less disappointing. Even the finale, with its problems, should be better just because of location and Jerry Goldsmith's competent score, but Kulik fumbles it. He also has some really bad blacking out sequences, one near the end, which might help to forecast the problem finish.

Still, some good acting, some great acting, a fine lead from Janssen; *Warning Shot* diverts for its entire runtime and intrigues for more than half of it.

Credits. Produced and directed by Buzz Kulik; screenplay by Mann Rubin, based on a novel by Whit Masterson; director of photography, Joseph F. Biroc; edited by Archie Marshek; music by Jerry Goldsmith; released by Paramount Pictures. Starring David Janssen (Sgt. Tom Valens), Ed Begley (Capt. Roy Klodin), Keenan Wynn (Sgt. Ed Musso), Sam Wanamaker (Frank Sanderman), Lillian Gish (Alice Willows), Stefanie Powers (Liz Thayer), Eleanor Parker (Mrs. Doris Ruston), George Grizzard (Walt Cody), George Sanders (Calvin York), Steve Allen (Perry Knowland), Carroll O'Connor (Paul Jerez), Joan Collins (Joanie Valens) and Walter Pidgeon (Orville Ames).

Genre. Mystery.

Posted. 28 October 2016.

Weblink. <https://thestopbutton.com/2016/10/28/warning-shot-1967/>.

Descriptors. Carroll O'Connor, Eleanor Parker, George Sanders, Joan Collins, Lillian Gish, Paramount Pictures, Stefanie Powers, Steve Allen, Warning Shot.

Home video availability. DVD, streaming.



The Woman in White **1948, Peter Godfrey**



I'm not sure what's more impressive in *The Woman in White*: Max Steiner's exceptional score or Sidney Greenstreet's performance. Both are phenomenal—it's probably Steiner's finest score. Greenstreet's performance of the film's cogent, ruthless villain is not just one of his finest performances, but one of the finest villains in film history. I've seen the film before, but somehow Greenstreet's endless supply of sinisterness made me frequently question the ending I remembered.

Almost everything else about *The Woman in White* is excellent—not on the level of those two particulars—but, overall, excellent. Peter Godfrey knows how to construct a shot—and especially how to move a camera—and there's some great comic moments in the film, which is not, overall, comical at all. John Abbott is great as a wacky recluse, John Emery is great as Greenstreet's sidekick. Great's a word I'd use a lot to describe aspects of *The Woman in White*... like Agnes Moorehead, she's great in a difficult role. (No surprise). However—I was just going to say the editing isn't great, but it isn't just the editing—*The Woman in White* has some drastic changes in its narrative and they hamstring the film.

The first half of *The Woman in White*, with Gig Young starting a new job as a drawing instructor for wealthy Eleanor Parker who comes across a strange girl, recently escaped from an asylum (also Parker), is fantastic. Absolutely wonderful. Here's the best direction in the film, the best part of Young's performance and two good roles for Parker. Alexis Smith is good as the friend who's got the crush on Young, even though Young and Parker (as the wealthy heiress, not the escaped mental patient) are getting romantic. Young and Parker

have great chemistry, regardless of the role Parker's playing. Young's new to the estate, just like the viewer, and the film draws them both in at the same time. It's masterful.

Then it skips ahead some months and now it's Smith the film's following, except not really, because Greenstreet eventually locks her in a room and then it follows Greenstreet for a long time. Parker's wealthy heiress is poisoned so that role is made inessential and the mental patient role doesn't have quite enough for her to do (though there are some nice special effects of the two of them in the same frame). Young and Smith have no chemistry as their romance takes off and the film drags on and on. Greenstreet's great in this part, best in this part, and his scenes with Smith do a lot for the picture. Young's almost useless, a long fall from the beginning, when he's absolutely fantastic.

Overall, *The Woman in White*'s best parts—with the exception of Greenstreet and Steiner—don't make it to the end. Parker's performance as the cursed mental patient is wonderful, but the romantic stuff with her and Young in the first half—which goes away—is just as good. By the end, it's hard to believe Young started out so strong and even Steiner's score, for the last bit, isn't as good as it had been. So, disappointing as a whole, but its pieces are stellar.

Credits. Directed by Peter Godfrey; screenplay by Stephen Morehouse Avery, based on the novel by Wilkie Collins; director of photography, Carl E. Guthrie; edited by Clarence Kolster; music by Max Steiner; produced by Henry Blanke; released by Warner Bros. Starring Alexis Smith (Marian Halcombe), Eleanor Parker (Laura Fairlie/Ann Catherick), Sydney Greenstreet (Count Alessandro Fosco), Gig Young (Walter Hartright), Agnes Moorehead (Countess Fosco), John Abbott (Frederick Fairlie), John Emery (Sir Percival Glyde) and Curt Bois (Louis).

Genre. Classics.

Posted. 8 August 2007.

Weblink. <https://thestopbutton.com/2007/08/08/the-woman-in-white-1948/>.

Descriptors. Agnes Moorehead, Alexis Smith, Eleanor Parker, Gig Young, John Abbott, Sydney Greenstreet, *The Woman in White*, Warner Bros., Wilkie Collins.

Home video availability. DVD.